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Wednesday May 1 1996

Abu Dhabi D 8.50	Spain OR 1.00
Albania L 2.20	Pakistan R 7.00
Austria AS 2.00	Poland Z 7.70
Bahrain B 2.00	Portugal E 2.00
Belgium BF 2.00	Qatar Q 1.50
Bulgaria L 1.70	Romania R 2.00
Canada CA 1.20	Saudi Arabia S 1.00
Cyprus CE 1.00	Slovenia S 1.50
Czech Republic CR 1.50	Slovenia S 1.50
Denmark DK 1.50	South Africa SA 1.00
Finland F 1.00	Sweden SK 1.50
France FR 1.00	Switzerland SF 1.50
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Greece G 3.50	Turkey TL 100.000
	USA US 2.00
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The Guardian

INTERNATIONAL

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46,541

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The race scientists

G2 with European weather

Francis Wheen on the Tory divorce rebels

Till death us do part?

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Society

Salford's urban oasis

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Shadowy Saudi group poised to be biggest shareholder in National Grid

Simon Beavis, Chris Barrie and Mark Milner

A SHADOWY Saudi Arabian investment group is expected to emerge as the largest shareholder in the National Grid after a series of complex share moves.

The Olayan group — an Athens-based investment company owned by the world's 15th richest man,

Suliman Saleh Olayan — looks poised to acquire £400 million worth of shares in the company which runs Britain's electricity network after they were sold yesterday by the Hanson Group.

The shares were bought by James Capel, the broking arm of the HSBC bank, but the bank immediately entered into a special deal with Crescent Holdings, the German registered share buying vehicle of the Olayan Group.

James Capel insisted it was a derivatives deal designed simply to hedge the transaction against "market risk". But the view in the City and the electricity industry was that the Saudi group would acquire control of the 12.5 per cent stake — by far the biggest holding in the company. James Capel refused to detail the nature of the deal.

The threat of Saudi Arabian investors emerging as the biggest shareholders in the Grid is likely to be a fresh embarrassment for the Government even though it retains a restrictive golden share in the company. It last faced a similar public interest dilemma when the Kuwait Investment Office bought a 22 per cent stake in British Petroleum in 1987. Ministers eventually forced the Kuwaitis to sell back the shares to BP.

Labour pounced on the Grid deal as evidence that the electricity industry was falling prey to speculation. Energy spokesman John Birt said it proved that "UK utilities have ceased to be part of a public service and instead are driven by international commodity speculation".

The Olayan dynasty is known to operate 30 businesses and financial enterprises in the Middle

East and throughout the world. Mr Olayan, aged 78, was a founding member of the Saudi-British Bank in Riyadh and holds senior board appointments at the Saudi oil group Saudi Aramco and the US bank Citicorp in Boston. In 1987 he was awarded an honorary knighthood from the Queen and has been honoured by other European heads of state. He is said to be a member of the elite Knickerbocker Club in New York and the Royal Automobile Club in London. His group was recently behind the purchase of a multi-million pound portfolio of property in Belgravia, London.

Hanson has been keen to sell off its Grid stake, which it acquired when it took control of the country's biggest regional electricity company, Eastern Group. Hanson sold its Grid stake for 192p a share, a price widely seen in the City to be poor. Grid shares rose to 205p after the transaction.

ven Duncan, a former Olayan consultant and a director of its European arm, to its board just before the Hanson takeover. But yesterday Hanson insisted that Mr Duncan, who has since left the electricity company, had no involvement in the latest deal.

Hanson sold its Grid stake for 192p a share, a price widely seen in the City to be poor. Grid shares rose to 205p after the transaction.



Mourners in Lebanon carry a flag-draped coffin in the southern village of Qama yesterday, at a mass funeral for most of the 102 victims of Israel's artillery attack on a United Nations compound. PHOTOGRAPH: ALI MOHAMMED

Tory MP faces debt deadline

Paul Murphy and David Hencke

JOHN Major's fragile one seat Parliamentary majority was under fresh pressure last night with the disclosure that a Tory backbencher, Roy Thomason, has been given a one month deadline to start repaying some of his £8 million debts or face the start of bankruptcy proceedings.



Roy Thomason: business ventures folded

Secret minutes of a meeting held between a Tory party "fixer" and the National Westminster bank reveal that Mr Thomason, MP for Bromsgrove, has been unable to keep up an agreed £1,000 a month payment after the loss of all his consultancies.

The MP, whose nursing and property empire based in his former local government stronghold at Bournemouth has collapsed, had previously been kept afloat by a secret deal among the banks to accept minimal payments until at least the date of the next general election.

The minutes of a meeting on April 16 between NatWest's deputy chief executive, John Melbourn, and Sir Gerrard Neale, former Tory MP for Cornwall North, reveal increasing restlessness about Mr Thomason's failure to handle his debts, which include money owed to the Inland Revenue.

Also present at the meeting were representatives of Barclays, Royal Bank of Scotland,



land might take unilateral action which could trigger bankruptcy proceedings.

More worryingly for those present was the absence of the Midland Bank, which has a direct charge over some of Mr Thomason's assets. Fears were expressed that the Mid-

land might take unilateral action which could trigger bankruptcy proceedings.

Other creditors not present included Allied Irish Banks and Lloyds.

As group deputy chief executive at NatWest, Mr Melbourn acts as the bank's front-man in dealing with its biggest corporate customers.

A NatWest spokesman last night declined to comment on the bank's relationship with Mr Thomason.

The MP's plight has been made worse by the loss of his consultancy with Dyson Bell Martin, solicitors and parlia-

mentary agents, who provided him with office accommodation and subsidised office services. He has also lost his consultancy with the West Bromwich Building Society, leaving him surviving on his £33,000 parliamentary salary and his office allowances.

Mr Thomason has previously tried to save some of his empire by buying back some of the property from the receivers with loans from NatWest and handed them over to a business run by his sons.

The former leader of Bournemouth council built up a property empire by buying up shops on the outskirts of the town and a shopping centre in Bourneville. He also set up a nursing home business. But both ventures became overstretched.

Tory whips, who helped to mount the rescue package for Mr Thomason last year, are likely to try to defer bank action for as long as possible. Even if proceedings begin in a month's time, it could take six months before Mr Thomason would be forced to resign his Commons seat. Even then the Conservatives could delay the by-election for a further three months.

Mr Thomason has a majority of 13,702 at Bromsgrove..

Anger as Hogg fails in beef talks

Cull plan crumbles under hard line from ministers in Brussels

Stephen Bates in Luxembourg

DOUGLAS Hogg, the Agriculture Secretary, last night failed to win a date for lifting European Union's ban on British beef.

After two days of negotiations at the agriculture ministers' council he was told by his 14 fellow ministers to come up with additional measures to eradicate BSE from British herds before there can be any concessions.

Mr Hogg said the Government had achieved "movement in the right direction". But he added: "There is a lot more negotiating to be done, but we have broken through by a combination of science, logic and tough talking."

Last night there were reports of John Major's anger at lack of movement. One agriculture minister said progress had been delayed because of telephone calls between Mr Hogg and London, and the British delegation was once more given a hard time in the Council of Ministers.

Earlier British Government warnings that its proposals were only conditional on securing a lifting of the ban, or even that it would start retaliatory measures, disappeared in the face of combined resistance from the 14 other member states to offer anything other than the minor face-saving formula that Britain had

made a start in tackling the problem.

Mr Hogg offered as proof that the ban was soon to be lifted the hope that the European veterinary experts' committee might next week recommend the lifting of the ban on heat byproducts such as gelatine, tallow and semen. But other ministers immediately dismissed that hope as unrealistic.

The meeting's concluding document stated: "The council... has considered the UK on heat byproducts such as gelatine, tallow and semen. The council has, however, noted the case for strengthening the programme, through addition to page 3, column 4

Mongolia's army of rainmakers fights enemy fire with snow

Tim Radford Science Editor

THINGS looked bleak in Ulan Bator. Fires that have devastated Mongolia's forests and pastures were advancing on the capital. So yesterday the authorities struck back.

silver bullets. A cumulonimbus cloud can hold 500,000 tons of water, but in droplets a thousand times smaller than a rain drop. The trick is to make them coalesce.

Within 20 minutes, the day was saved. Under the direction of meteorologists, Mongolian artillery fired scores of shells that exploded in the clouds, triggered a six-inch snowfall and claimed a famous victory.

"The fire spread to about 20 miles from Ulan Bator in the night, but the snow put it out" said Badarch, the mayor of Terezi, a popular tourist destination 25 miles from Ulan Bator.

Three weeks of fires have killed at least 15 people and destroyed 20 million acres of forest and pastureland, causing up to £1 billion of damage to the fragile economy, officials say.

The Mongolian military probably used a technique with a touch of witchcraft:

Scientists in Australia, Israel, the United States and Russia have tried various techniques to turn clouds into rain. They have hurled frozen carbon dioxide and silver iodide to give the droplets something to "seed" around. But no one has ever been sure whether hi-tech rainmaking was any more effective than the old shaman methods.

The Meteorological Office in Bracknell yesterday had its doubts. "Whether the shock waves managed to click something that caused it to snow, or whether, had they hung on for another 20 minutes, it would have snowed anyway, we will never know," a spokesman said.

Even if it works, the technique has its downside. "If you make it rain where you are, that means somewhere further down the line won't get it."

Inside

Britain
Ferry operator P&O admitted passenger numbers on the Dover-Calais route had dived by a fifth and blamed Eurotunnel.

World News
As the impact of communism on rural China wanes, people are returning to old beliefs and ancient rituals.

City
NatWest warned its 48,000-strong workforce that it risks losing business to rivals because it makes too many mistakes.

Sport
Kevin Keegan's critics must have been surprised seeing the machness of the Newcastle manager after the TV election. Also: Liverpool.

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4.8% ABV
100% MALT
BOMBARDIER
PREMIUM BITTER

CHARLES WELLS

BREWED BY THE CHARLES WELLS FAMILY
BREWERY, BEDFORDSHIRE, EST. 1876.

Sketch

To scowl and not be a villain



Simon Hoggart

THE Lion King sat in his seat, scowling. That scowl is Mr Heseltine's plotting face. Actually, he resembles wicked Uncle Scar more than the king himself, or even the vulnerable little cub, voiced by John Major in the hit film.

The scowl is supposed to signal: "I am defending this little cub. Whoever dares to threaten him will have me to deal with first." Of course, it really means the exact opposite. If I were Mr Major, and had a wing mirror fitted to my glasses so that I could see the expression on the Deputy Prime Minister's face, I would be worried by that glower.

Like all good assassins Mr Heseltine must not be seen carrying the fixing bomb on to the streets. If, say, the Tories lose 800 council seats tomorrow, we can expect to hear him touring the radio and TV studios on Friday pleading undying fidelity to Mr Major, angrily denouncing anyone who dares to hint that the party might improve its chances of re-election by changing leader.

He will snarl committedly, he will jabber faithfully, and with true allegiance he will spit in the face of those who think to question his unquenchable fealty.

Then he will go home and hope that the riff-raff who run the 1922 Committee, the men in shell suits, will have told the Prime Minister to go by lunchtime.

It was Paddy Ashdown who raised the topic first. Heza pointed his face in the direction of the Liberal benches and looked rubber dagers at their leader. Mr Ashdown said pompously that he believed Mr Major to be an honourable man (which is a bit like telling an all-in wrestler that he's good at origami; it's quite irrelevant to the trade).

"Will you confirm therefore that you understand that if,

once again, Conservative MPs should seek to change the Prime Minister, while denying the country the chance to change the Government, that will be totally unacceptable

On and on Mr Ashdown blethered. What he meant was, if they kick you out of the party, will you dynamite the place on your way?

At this point Mr Major had a tricky choice. Either he could make a ringing and scornful denunciation of all those who thought his position as Dear Leader of the Thankful British People was in doubt. Or he could say something Majorish instead.

The trouble with ringing denunciations is that they make for embarrassing headlines. "Major: I'm Not Quitting" tends to translate in MPs' minds as "Major: I Know I've Had It". So he said Majorishly: "I fear you are dealing in fantasy again!"

A Labour MP, Mike O'Brien (Warwick N), asked about the rumour that Mr Major had agreed to make way for his deputy if tomorrow's results are even worse than expected (which means truly diabolical).

Mr O'Brien added: "You have the support of at least half of those on the Conservative benches and everyone on this side!"

Mr Major replied with another of his not-quite-right circumlocutions: "I suspect you are in mischief-making mode." He had certainly rumbled Mr O'Brien's little game!

Labour MPs bayed in happy amusement. Puzzlingly, the Prime Minister added: "Clearly he wasn't in mischief-making mode. He was just being silly!"

George Foulkes (Lab. Carrick) produced much the same line, and was similarly Majored: "I have no intention of assisting your silly question!"

At one point he made a mistake. Asked to comment on Cedric Brown and the rising number of complaints to British Gas, he said: "I believe people, when they get an unsatisfactory service, are right to complain!"

Labour MPs chorled merrily. Michael Heseltine glowered furiously for their rudeness to the Once and Future Leader, who must be in bigger trouble than we knew.

First night

Frieze frames vivid premières

Andrew Clements

Pulse Shadows Queen Elizabeth Hall

THE South Bank's Harrison Birtwistle festival, Secret Theatres, has not just been a retrospective; it also includes three premières.

The series will end on Saturday with the first performance of a set of Birtwistle's arrangements of Bach chorale preludes; last Friday Joanna MacGregor and the London Sinfonietta introduced Slow Frieze, a new work for piano and chamber orchestra, while in the Queen Elizabeth Hall yesterday there was the British première of an evening-long cycle of songs and string quartet pieces that Birtwistle has called Pulse Shadows.

Though the two works are not thematically connected in any way, the idea of musical "friezes" runs through both. In the Sinfonietta's piece it is the unchanging endless melodies of the orchestral wind instruments, switched on and off by the percussion, that give the work its title and provide the backdrop to the piano's highly charged, lingering solos and the remorseless clockworks of the strings. In Pulse Shadows four of the quartet movements are labelled as Friezes; the other five are Fantasias.

This nine-movement sequence can be played alone as a substantial, free-standing work but it can also be interlocked, as it was here, with nine songs, all of them settings of the poems of the Jewish-Romanian poet Paul Celan, sung in the English translations of Michael Hamburger.

Celan has fascinated Birtwistle for some years; he first set one of his poems in 1988 before he began work on his Covent Garden opera Gawain, and he has returned to them repeatedly since, building up this collection.

They are dark, introspective texts, clipped and aphoristic in style; they are poems that make every syllable tell, make the language work for everything it struggles to express.

Scored for soprano and an ensemble of two clarinets and three strings, Birtwistle's musical responses are economical and tightly impacted. There are occasional echoes of earlier works but there is also a lot of new writing too.

That freshness is true of the string quartet pieces too. The five Fantasias are free, discursive movements, sometimes recalling the quartet writing of Alban Berg, sometimes the concision of Webern. The Friezes are much more strictly circumscribed: single, non-developing ideas laid end to end, yet defined by their physical energy just as much as the Fantasias tend to be withdrawn and introspective.

What never changes though is the commitment of Birtwistle's interpreters — just as MacGregor and the Sinfonietta under Markus Stenz had given a superb account of Slow Frieze, so the without-doubt accurate Arditti Quartet, the soprano Claron McFadden and Capricorn conducted by Lionel Friend made sure the new world of Pulse Shadows was just as vividly projected.

This review appeared in later editions yesterday.

Police hold 17 over tickets

Owen Bowcott

DETECTIVES from Scotland Yard's football intelligence unit arrested 17 people in London yesterday in raids on ticket agencies offering executive hospitality deals for next month's FA Cup Final and the Euro 96 tournament.

The raids followed mounting concern over the way seats have been sold through

outlets other than the approved Euro 96 agency, Synchro Systems.

Among the companies visited by police was the National Sporting Club, founded in 1881, whose chairman is the former England Test bowler Bob Willis. The club, operated under licence by Mr Willis and his brother David, was offering ticket packages for the opening game in the Euro 96 championships for £300.



Abbé Pierre, aged 83; defended Roger Garaudy, whose book casts doubt on the Holocaust PHOTOGRAPH: MICHELINE PELLETIER

France's 'living saint' falls from grace

Paul Webster in Paris

ABBÉ PIERRE, who barely a week ago was seen as a living saint, has plunged from being France's most popular figure to its national pariah, accused of casting doubt on Nazi crimes against Jews.

The Franciscan priest, aged 83, who smuggled Jews out of France during the second world war and influenced both Socialist and Gaullist governments, has been rejected by the Catholic Church, the Jewish community, human rights organisations and his closest friends.

For more than 50 years, Abbé Pierre, whose real name is Henri Grouès, fought a lonely battle for the poor and homeless through his world-wide Emmaus organisation.

His campaigns became enmeshed with those of three other human rights evangelists: Bernard Kouchner, the former humanitarian affairs minister, Jacques Gaillot, the former Bishop of Evreux,



Bernard Kouchner (left)

'Of course, I know you haven't read the book but then what are you talking about? This confession, in my view, is the worst sin you have ever committed.'

and Leon Schwartzberg, a crusading cancer expert.

All three have turned on him publicly since he criticised the prosecution of the philosopher Roger Garaudy, aged 83, whose book, The Founding Myths of Israel Politics, questions the extent of the Holocaust.

The only other significant public support for Mr Garaudy, who risks jail for denying Nazi war crimes, has come from the British-

born revisionist historian Robert Farrison.

Mr Kouchner, who co-wrote a book with Abbé Pierre, published an article in Le Monde, "How can you stand at the side of this swine, mon père?" he asked, referring to Mr Garaudy, a former Communist who converted to Islam.

Abbé Pierre defended himself in Liberation, after saying Mr Garaudy had the right to express his views.

He denied accusations of anti-Semitism and called for debate on the accuracy of Holocaust research. The defence changed embarrassed reaction into a fury of condemnation, intensified by a unanimous media assault yesterday.

The League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism told the priest to resign from its committee. Jean Kahn, the president of the Jewish consistory, echoed the chief rabbi, Joseph Sitruk, by calling the priest's attitude "dramatic, disappointing and unacceptable".

The Gaullist justice minister, Jacques Toubon, expressed official disapproval, while the Archbishop of Paris, Jean-Marie Lustiger, led Catholic bishops in deploring Abbé Pierre's "scandalous" support for Mr Garaudy.

With his moral authority in tatters, the priest is in retreat in a Norman monastery. Last night, he told the grand rabbi he condemned the trivialisation and denial of the Holocaust, but that Mr Garaudy's book remained on his desk.

It was business as normal, says Cantona case accused

Vivek Chaudhary

MATTHEW Simmons, the Crystal Palace fan who was the target of Eric Cantona's kung fu kick, claimed yesterday that he was merely on his way to the toilet when he was attacked, and did nothing to provoke the Manchester United footballer.

Simmons, aged 21, told Croydon magistrates' court, south London, that he was making his way there seconds after Cantona had been sent off in the Premier League game against Manchester United in January 1995 at Selhurst Park, Crystal Palace's home ground.

"The crowd was very noisy," he said. "Everyone was cheering and shouting, everyone was pleased that he [Cantona] had been sent off, me included."

"Like any normal fan, I joined in with this and was

just shouting 'Off, off, off' and pointing towards the dressing room."

Simmons, of Thornton Heath, Surrey, denies using threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour likely to cause unlawful violence by another person.

He also denies a second charge of using threatening, abusive or insulting words within the hearing of a person likely to be caused harassment, alarm or distress.

Asked by Jeffrey McCann, prosecuting, if he racially abused Cantona, Simmons replied: "I never used any vile words. As far as I'm concerned, I was doing nothing wrong to deserve them actions."

"I was going about my normal business, watching a football match."

Earlier yesterday, the court was told that Simmons, a former Crystal Palace season ticket holder, rushed out of

his seat to hurl racial abuse at Cantona as he made his way off the pitch.

James Mulligan, a Manchester United fan from London who was sitting in the same stand as Simmons, said: "I saw a person who I now know to be Matthew Simmons make his way down the aisle and stand a few feet away from me."

"He was making gestures and abusing Cantona verbally. Matthew Simmons was swearing loudly and repeatedly. He called Cantona a 'fucking French wanker'."

Crystal Palace steward John Wood said he noticed Simmons leaning over the barrier making gestures at Cantona.

Simmons, who has been banned from Selhurst Park since the incident, told the court that he had gone voluntarily to the police to give his version of events.

The hearing continues.



Matthew Simmons... was just shouting 'off, off, off'

Defensive PM attacks crime leak

Alan Travis Home Affairs Editor

JOHN Major was yesterday thrown on to the defensive in the face of the disclosure that the crime rate is rising remorselessly again.

The Prime Minister even went as far as repudiating some of the Home Office's most senior officials by insisting that parts of the official minute recording their meeting last week and leaked to the Guardian were inaccurate.

But in the face of repeated challenges by Tony Blair to "come clean", Mr Major refused to detail the inaccuracies and failed to deny the contrary disclosure that the crime rate rose by four per cent over the year to January 1996, continued to rise in February and now appears to be on an upward trend.

Nor did he deny that the Prison Service Director General Richard Tilt, will meet the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, this week to raise serious anxieties about the rising prison population.

The intensity of the row revealed the political importance attached by the Government to a leak of the crime figures especially just before a key set of local elections.

The Home Office warning that the rise in the prison population was outstripping official forecasts at the same time that crime was rising also called into question penal reformers the Home Secretary's claim that "prison works" in cutting crime.

The disclosure also sparked a furious exchange of correspondence between Mr Howard and his Labour counterpart, Jack Straw. Mr Howard sidestepped the charge that crime was rising again and

instead disputed the detail of the figures, insisting that the increases had only taken place in four out of the last six months for which there were official figures.

"Monthly figures are always volatile but as it happens recorded crime fell in each of the last two months of 1995 — the latest complete monthly figures available," said Mr Howard claiming this disproved the statement in the Home Office minute that "recorded crime had now risen for six consecutive months".

Last Thursday when asked to comment in the Commons on the "latest recorded crime figures" Mr Howard made no mention of increases in crime. Instead all he told MPs was that the three years to the end 1995 had seen "the largest ever continuous fall in the number of annually recorded crimes". He omitted to say that the recorded crime figures saw a net rise of 28,000 offences in the last six months of 1995.

In the Commons yesterday Mr Major also blocked all demands to explain how the leaked minutes were inaccurate, saying only that "when we have the figures available we will publish them in the normal way". Later it emerged that the only inaccurate figure in the document was the size of the prison population which was recorded in the minutes as standing at a record 54,974. The correct figure is 53,974.

Mr Straw said the revelations had seriously undermined the Government's claim to be "turning the tide on crime" adding that Mr Major and Mr Howard had "dined out on recent minor falls in the crime figures yet crime rose over the last six months of last year and the trend appears to be continuing into 1996".

Recorded crime: July 1995 to February 1996

Month	Offences	Change compared with 1994-1995
Jul	416,253	+8,269 (+2.03%)
Aug	423,121	-4,248 (-0.99%)
Sep	418,967	+8,439 (+2.06%)
Oct	424,291	+26,132 (+6.10%)
Nov	443,021	-11,886 (-2.44%)
Dec	427,954	-82 (-0.01%)
Jan	n/a	n/a (+4.00%)
Feb	n/a	n/a (+2.00%)

Source: Home Office.

Right warned by Heseltine

Michael White Political Editor

MICHAEL Heseltine again rode to John Major's rescue last night when he squashed predictions of another looming Tory leadership crisis in the wake of expected humiliation in tomorrow's local government elections.

To make his intentions abundantly clear, Mr Heseltine diverted some of his firepower away from Labour in order to warn the Euro-sceptic Right and their media allies against "the narrow pursuit of ideological purity" that would alienate floating voters — not something an aspiring candidate would risk ahead of a supposed contest.

Leaders must strike a policy balance at the very time "when significant parts of (their) core support genuinely believe that the right way to attract uncommitted voters is to accentuate the policies that particularly appeal to the basic core," Mr Heseltine warned.

As for Sir James Goldsmith's threat to run Referendum Party candidates, he said: "I find it incomprehensible that the more Euro-sceptic some people and newspapers become, the more they seem to risk the prospects of a craven Labour government, committed to the very policies they hate most."

Since the Deputy Prime Minister made his boss's case more effectively than Mr Major himself did at Question Time yesterday, Mr Heseltine's speech to the left-leaning Tory Reform Group (TRG) will not deter backbenchers

determined to stir up trouble if tomorrow's defeat in the town halls is worse than the expected 500-plus.

Cynics will insist he knows perfectly well that a high-profile speech will neutralise protestations of loyalty. But Mr Heseltine mocked media "mischief" and told newspapers to put the real news — a revolving economy — on their front pages.

With Labour stirring furiously and ministers again in retreat over key Commons bills, both party and Downing Street officials dismissed as "baloney" revived speculation about a pact during last year's Redwood challenge — under which Mr Major agreed to stand aside for his deputy if Tory fortunes had not improved by this summer.

When the Prime Minister was taunted about it by Labour and Lib Dem MPs yesterday, he called it fantasy but forgot to add that he would be leading his party into the coming election — something his staff was left to stress later.

Mr Heseltine was in no doubt as he lavished praise on Mr Major's "bold and brave campaigning" which snatched victory during a recession in 1992.

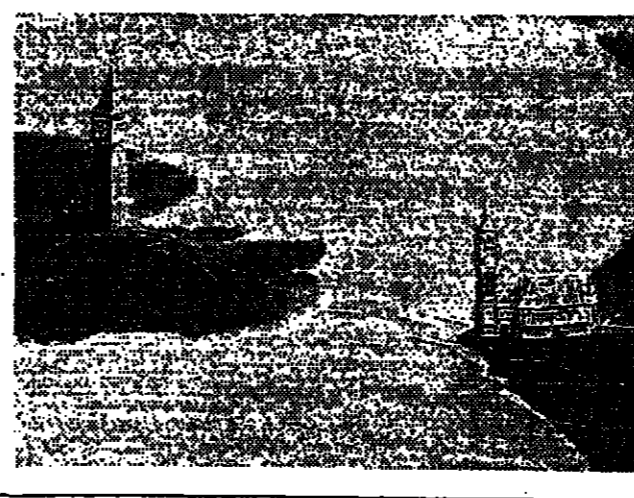
The main thrust of Mr Heseltine's speech last night was a familiar attack on New Labour as little different from Old Labour, still the creature of trade unions and other vested interests, and incapable of implementing Blairite rhetoric in the many town halls Labour actually controls.

Politics, page 4; John Gray, page 9

Cruise around the clock to Calais...

RELAX and just cruise across from Dover to Calais — the shortest sea route to France.

Large, luxurious car ferries with shops, restaurants and entertainment on board, plus hovercraft, provide rapid, comfortable crossings with a departure every thirty minutes. Fast on and off loading on both sides of the Channel helps to speed your journey. Instant motorway access from Calais port provides an open door to the entire European motorway network.



For a shopping day, a relaxing stay or for immediate access to motorway...

Calais ...begins with sea.

DOVER/CALAIS OVER 140 CROSSINGS DAILY BY P&O EUROPEAN FERRIES, STENA LINE, SEAFRANCE & HOVERSPEED.

Handwritten Arabic text at the bottom of the page.

Most were a bit manic, but the men of verse fared well compared with playwrights



Novelists Evelyn Waugh (left) and Scott Fitzgerald (centre), and playwright Tennessee Williams are awarded top ratings for disturbed behaviour

Poets 'least mad of the literati'

Psychiatrist's study gives the lie to Lord Byron

Chris Mihill Medical Correspondent

IT IS a myth that all poets are mad — the real sufferers of mental instability are to be found among novelists and playwrights, a psychiatrist says today.

Felix Post argues that contrary to popular belief, and the famous saying of Lord Byron, poets live relatively stable lives, although there are famous examples of mental instability and their problems are greater than those of the general population.

Poets tend to be more prone to mood swings but in general they have escaped other forms of mental illness and seem to have more ordered lives than novelists or playwrights.

Dr Post has drawn up a psychopathology "league table" of 100 famous American and British novelists, poets and playwrights, ranking them according to events such as alcoholism, marriage failure or suicide, and by psychiatric traits such as manic depression.

"A suspicion that — con-

How sane are the great writers?

Table with 7 columns (0-6) and 7 rows (Poets, Poets also prose writers, Poets also play writers, Prose writers, Prose writers also poets, Play writers, Play and prose writers) listing authors and their corresponding scores.

trary to Lord Byron's dictum, all poets are mad, — poets might be somewhat more stable, hardened into an impression when no traits of personality disorder were found in 14 per cent of poets, as against 7 per cent of novelists and only 4 per cent of playwrights," he says.

Dr Post puts forward a theory that instead of genius being caused by "madness," it is the intense

mental effort required for verbal creativity of the highest order that cause changes in the neural pathways of the brain.

In the ranking of Dr Post's psychiatric league table — which contains a scale of zero to six, with zero being the sanest — the most disturbed writers include the American poets John Berryman (1914-72) and Hart Crane (1899-1932), both of whom committed

suicide. Others scoring a five for extreme behaviour are Scott Fitzgerald, Evelyn Waugh, William Faulkner and Tennessee Williams.

Those scoring a zero, for the sanest behaviour, include the poets Robert Bridges, William Bryant, Oliver Wendell Holmes and Sidney Lanier.

Robert Lowell, who suffered bouts of manic illness and heavy drinking. They share the ranking with Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, Eugene O'Neill and Edgar Allan Poe.

Oscar Wilde rates a three, WB Yeats a two, and George Orwell a one. Ezra Pound, TS Eliot and WH Auden all manage a four. Dr Post published a previous study in 1994, which looked at the psychiatric

characteristics of 300 famously gifted men, covering writers, composers, painters, scientists, politicians and philosophers. He concluded that writers were the most disturbed, so he decided to extend his study to see if mental illness was related to specific forms of writing.

In his latest study, published in the British Journal of Psychiatry, he says that only 31 per cent of the poets in his group suffered from alcoholism, compared with 54 per cent of the playwrights.

Forty-three per cent of the poets died over the age of 74, as against only 24 per cent of the novelists and 38 per cent of the playwrights. The playwrights had a 71 per cent rate of broken or problematic marriages, compared with 54 per cent of the novelists and only 26 per cent of the poets.

In terms of mental illness such as manic depression, severe depression and mood swings, none of the groups fared well, but 80 per cent of poets had symptoms compared with 87 per cent of playwrights.

He concludes: "Against expectation, poets were somewhat less burdened than writers of prose fiction, by personality deviance, psycho-sexual and marital problems." Dr Post did not look at female writers, or living authors.

Mandela faces turmoil

David Beresford in Johannesburg

PRESIDENT Nelson Mandela's difficulties in controlling an increasingly turbulent South Africa were highlighted yesterday when a one-day strike turned ugly, with an attack on a leading MP.

Strikers took to the streets against politicians whom they accuse of trying to ensure inequality in the post-apartheid constitution.

"The issue we are fighting is a serious attempt by the National Party, by the Democratic Party and by ... big business in South Africa to entrench inequality, to entrench the consequences of colonialism," Zwelinzima Vavi, the deputy leader of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) told thousands of workers marching through Johannesburg.

Tony Leon, the leader of the Democratic Party and a vocal critic of the government, was punched in the face as he ran the gauntlet of trade union

demonstrators outside the parliament in Cape Town. He had just collected a memorandum from Cosatu's secretary-general, Sam Shilows, protesting against opposition attempts to enshrine employers' rights to a "lock-out" in the constitution.

In Pretoria, the deputy leader of the Democratic Party, William Mntsi, had to be whisked to safety by police and marshals when a crowd shouted threats to kill him.

The incidents are embarrassing for President Mandela and the African National Congress, who have been caught in a dilemma by the strike. The ANC last week backed the protest, anxious to align themselves with their Cosatu allies. They were wrong-footed by the dramatic collapse of the rand at the end of the week, the strike being seen as a contributory factor.

The government was reported to have faxed its embassies at the weekend, urging them to circulate word before the financial markets opened that the strike was unlikely to take place. Although

the currency steadied on Monday morning, that seemed a result of the Reserve Bank hiking up interest rates.

Cosatu's insistence on holding the strike at a time of economic crisis has left the impression that the Mandela administration is unable to control its own constituency.

Support for the strike was uneven yesterday. The main mining company, Anglo American, said about 15 per cent of their workers stayed away. Durban business reported about 50 per cent support for the strike. The car industry in the Eastern Cape was effectively shut down while, in the Cape Town area, the stayaway had little apparent impact.

Cosatu strike organisers said between 40 and 70 per cent of workers in some key industries had downed tools. President Mandela's Truth Commission suffered a serious blow at the hands of the supreme court, which ordered it to open its confidential files to security force personnel accused of atrocities during the apartheid era.

P&O admits Chunnel blow

Ian King

FERRY operator P & O yesterday admitted passenger numbers on the Dover-Calais route had dipped by almost a fifth over the past year and blamed Eurotunnel.

Passenger numbers on the route slipped from 1.9 million in the first three months of 1995 to just under 1.6 million in the same period this year. The number of cars using the service fell by almost a quarter, from 380,391 to 292,780.

The company insisted the falls had been predictable. "As expected, P & O's carryings continued to fall as Eurotunnel's Le Shuttle service approached its natural share of the market," it said.

"During the period, Le Shuttle increased its tourist vehicle market share from approximately 20 per cent to 40 per cent. It has stayed around this level for the first three months of 1996."

P & O also highlighted figures suggesting that its share of the lucrative freight market on the Dover-Calais run

had been far less severely hit. But Eurotunnel, which last week announced pre-tax losses for 1995 of £225 million — one of the worst results in corporate history — responded gleefully to P & O's figures, saying the tide was still running in its favour.

Eurotunnel's co-chairman Sir Alastair Morton — who last week promised the ferry operators "more grief" — said: "We know people like the service that we offer, and today's news further underscores customer preference for Le Shuttle."

Eurotunnel is shortly expected to announce further price cuts, prompting another price war. Already, Stena Sealink, the Swedish-owned ferry operator, has announced price cuts on its duty free side this month to compete with Eurotunnel, whose range includes cigarettes at £1 a pack.

P & O yesterday denied reports that it is planning to merge its cross-Channel operations with Stena, which has also seen its market share dent by Le Shuttle. However, the group is expected to

send a dossier to the Office of Fair Trading over the next few weeks, highlighting how badly it has been hit by Eurotunnel.

P & O wants the Government to scrap undertakings it gave three years ago not to merge with rivals like Stena. It will argue that the undertakings, demanded to preserve competition and to help Eurotunnel establish itself, have been rendered pointless by Eurotunnel's successful entry to the market.

P & O's corporate affairs director, Peter Smith, said: "We have always been unhappy about the undertakings, and regard them as unhelpful. We are looking for medium-term consolidation among the ferry operators — something will come inevitably."

Stena also denied the talk, but it is known that Stena's managing director, Gareth Cooper, is thought to have called in a presentation last week to MPs for a change in cross-Channel competition rules.

Notebook, page 11

If this is really the best the House can offer, God preserve us from its worst. Swarms of non-sequiturs flapped and buzzed through the chamber as self-righteous politicians boasted of their unswerving commitment to the sanctity of marriage.

Francis Wheen Q2 page 5

Hogg fails to get European beef ban lifted

continued from page 1

tional measures particularly targeted on herds where a significant number of cases of BSE has been detected.

It warned that only when the unspecified extra measures are put in place, together with those already announced, and following surveillance from the European Commission, could a

step-by-step lifting of the ban be contemplated.

A report by member states' chief veterinary officers, was even more uncompromising, calling for a more extensive culling of cattle than the extra 42,000 offered by the British last week, estimated to reduce the incidence of the disease by 15 to 30 per cent. The report demanded more de-

tailed measures, improved supervision, better identification of animals at risk of the disease, and more extensive controls over animal movements within Britain.

The shadow agriculture minister, Gavin Stang, said the Government's failure to secure any significant progress was a "serious setback".

Advertisement for 'Q' magazine featuring a large 'Q' logo and the text: 'New issue OUT NOW! "Would Sid approve? Who f***ing cares?"' and a portrait of Sid Vicious.

Advertisement for 'SEX PISTOLS' magazine featuring a portrait of Sid Vicious and the text: 'It's like punk never happened. This month in Q, a world exclusive interview with all four furiously foul-mouthed Sex Pistols on the eve of their Filthy Lucre comeback tour.' and 'Out now!'

News in brief

'Road rage' killer jailed for four years

A MOTORIST who ran over and killed a man as he lay injured following a hit-and-run accident was jailed for four years yesterday after being convicted of manslaughter.

Funfair attack girl dies

A 13-YEAR-OLD girl died yesterday after receiving serious head injuries when she was attacked near a funfair at around 8pm on Monday.

Children hurt in bus crash

FIFTY children were treated in hospital for shock and minor injuries yesterday after two packed double-deck buses collided on a regular school run in heavy rain.

Baby deaths prompt ban

THE Department of Health yesterday banned hospitals from using wooden spatulas as makeshift splints for premature babies, after two babies died and a third had part of an arm amputated due to fungal infection contracted from the equipment.

'Tougher' tests for pupils

NATIONAL reading and science tests for seven and 11-year-olds will be tougher than last year, the Government's curriculum advisers revealed yesterday.

BBC 5 Live is national station of the year as Virgin pips 'saviour' Evans in Sony awards



Radio 5 Live controller Jenny Abramsky with presenter John Inverdale. Nationwide show won the Sony news and current affairs award. PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID SULLIVAN

'Radio Bloke' seals BBC day of triumph

Andrew Cull Media Correspondent

RADIO 5 Live, the BBC's news and sports network, was yesterday named national station of the year at the Sony radio awards, the industry's equivalent of the Oscars.

Sony radio awards '96

- UK station of the year: Radio 5 Live
UK broadcaster of the year: Chris Evans (Radio 1)
Breakfast show (music): Russ and Jonjo (Virgin Radio)
Breakfast show (speech): Europe Today (BBC World Service)

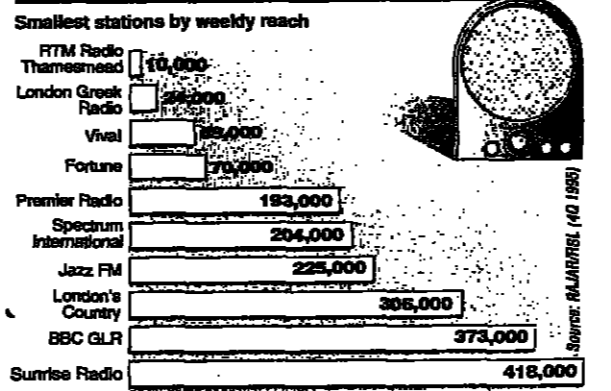
The judges said: "The excellent team of sports presenters deliver clear, exciting and informed broadcasting, so engaging that it makes listeners feel they are actually there at the event itself."

Tough going as stations fail to find listeners

Andrew Cull on radio newcomers

MORE than 800 of the great and good in broadcasting gathered at London's Grosvenor House hotel yesterday to tuck into mousses d'avocat en salade and aiguillettes de canard limonaise.

Struggling to be heard



Lynne Franks, the mood is one of crisis. Instead of a target audience of 400,000, it is attracting only 59,000 listeners a week.

Overseas voluntary worker fails Lilley's 'benefit tourist' test

David Brindle, Social Services Correspondent

A VOLUNTARY worker who spent 19 months in Tanzania cannot claim social security benefits after failing a government residence test to curb "benefit tourism".



Jennifer and Juma Semahimbo: 'Penalised for marrying a foreigner and helping others' PHOTOGRAPH: STUART HARRISON

9,738 British citizens. Mrs Semahimbo, 33, a qualified social worker, gave up her £19,000-a-year job as a court welfare officer to go to Tanzania to work with women's groups on a fixed-term contract.

Tanzanian tax clearance certificate stamped on her passport indicates residence in that country "rather than something more temporary". She says it has been standard practice for volunteers in Tanzania to get tax clearance stamps to speed their departure from the country.

Dixons 1 HOUR FREE TALKTIME EVERY MONTH FOR UP TO 2 MONTHS. Includes Motorola Orange MFI Mobile Phone. Price £29.99. Includes call divert, call barring, call waiting and call hold.

"God forgive me, God forgive me," Zarbibi was screaming, as though she were somehow to blame and not the men who laid the mine; or those who designed and sold it to them. Yet although I felt wretchedly helpless, I didn't feel we were wrong to be there. John Simpson. G2 page 4

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Advertisement for Yard's V... featuring a large image of a person's face and text including "Yard's V", "owlam form", "reactive sooth", and "sters turn deal ear".

Nick Davies on an operation to recruit a Jamaican 'supergrass' which uncovered more than police wanted to know

Yard's Yardie is too hot to handle

West Indian's life of crime in UK and Jamaica hushed up by Home Office



Eaton Green, left, seen in a security video, has been an embarrassment to his handlers, even though he led to the conviction of Roban 'Bumpy' Thomas, right, and another man for holding up 150 people at a party

AN UNDERCOVER police operation to procure a new supergrass has blown up in Scotland Yard's face, leading to accusations that officers are failing to act on allegations of serious crime including murder. The operation is the latest twist in the saga of Eaton Green, aged 28, a "Yardie" (Jamaican gangster) gunman who caused a minor scandal last year when it was disclosed that for more than two years he had been a paid informant for Scotland Yard and that his handlers had allowed him to bring known Yardies into the country. Green's cover was blown when he was put on trial for an armed robbery in Nottingham. At a retrial, he gave evidence for the prosecution, as a result of which, last October, two Yardies received long prison sentences and Green was jailed for six years. The Guardian has learned that Green was taken from prison last November to a

Metropolitan police safe house, where he agreed to become a supergrass, providing a detailed confession of his life of crime. But he disclosed information which was so embarrassing that, according to senior sources in the Home Office, it has been suppressed. The sources say Green has confessed to at least 10 murders in Jamaica, some of them allegedly ordered by leading politicians. He also told police he had lied under oath, which could lead to the release of dangerous gunmen convicted on his evidence. Green confessed to a series of violent crimes in the United Kingdom during the two years when he was a Scotland Yard informer. There is evidence that his police handlers knew about some of his London crimes and that — in a breach of Home Office rules — they protected him when other London detectives wanted to charge him. Previously, Green denied under oath that he committed crimes while an informer.

In his statement Green has named senior figures who still hold power in Kingston. But the Home Office sources say that, months later, the Yard has neither made any outside inquiry into his confessions of murder, nor for level corruption, they will lose the assistance of Jamaican police, who have been supplying them with valuable intelligence on the Yardies. They also allegedly fear that if they disclose Green's confessions to murder, they

who wanted to keep their informer on the streets. Home Office guidelines forbid this. It is understood that Green has admitted that he routinely used a firearm, committed armed robberies, bought and sold large quantities of crack cocaine, and ran protection rackets in south London where he and his "crew" extorted money from black businesses. He was never prosecuted for any of these offences, and was finally brought to book only when he committed the armed robbery in Nottingham where his handlers were unable to protect him. At the end of the Leicester trial, on Green's evidence, Ro-

han "Bumpy" Thomas was jailed for 14 years and Steven Crossdale for eight years. They were convicted of using guns to hold up 150 people at a "blues" party. Thomas was also said to have tried to pull a gun on detectives who arrested him. Both have appealed against their convictions. So far, Scotland Yard has not informed the two men's lawyers of Green's effective confession of perjury. An investigation by the Guardian and World in Action found last year that in an attempt to protect Green, Scotland Yard officers had shielded him from arrest by Nottingham police, failed to pass on vital intelligence and tampered with documents. Officers had then tried to mislead the court and to abort the trial, over at the risk of allowing the other Yardies to go free. Behind the scenes, last year's furore over Green produced a row between Scotland Yard and immigration offi-

cers, who had allowed Green to stay in the United Kingdom and permitted his Yardie associates to enter the UK unimpeded. Two immigration officers have lost their jobs in the wake of the affair. Brian Fotheringham, a specialist on Yardies, has been transferred to other duties. His superior, Robert Saltan, is in the process of taking early retirement, officially on health grounds. The two men have been blamed for the rule-bending surrounding Green, but their colleagues complain that they have been treated unjustly. Home Office sources, too, believe that the rule-bending occurred only because Green's police handlers, who were evidently working without the supervision of senior Scotland Yard officers, insisted that it should. Scotland Yard said last week that it had not conducted a disciplinary inquiry into its officers' handling of Green. His principal handler, PC Steve Barker, is still at

Scotland Yard in the intelligence section dealing with Yardies. A Yard spokesman said last week: "As far as we're concerned, we've done nothing wrong. There is no need to conduct a disciplinary inquiry, because no one has made a complaint." It is understood that Eaton Green continues to serve his sentence in a safe house, where he is under 24-hour armed guard and where he has spent months producing his confession and living in some comfort, with a television and occasional visits from a girlfriend. Home Office sources say that Scotland Yard hoped to trade Green and his information with law enforcement agencies in the United States, and that officials in the US embassy in London have been briefed about his confession. What the Yard did not foresee was that Green would embarrass them as much as the Yardie gangs they wanted to expose.

Green has confessed to at least 10 murders in Jamaica, some of them allegedly ordered by leading politicians. He also told police he had lied under oath, which could lead to the release of dangerous gunmen convicted on his evidence

warded details to the Crown Prosecution Service, Interpol or the Jamaican authorities. Officers are said to be worried that if the truth about their informant's alleged murderous history comes out, the Yard will look foolish for employing a professional killer without checking his past. They are also said to fear that if they embarrass the Jamaican authorities by presenting them with evidence of high-

level corruption, they will lose the assistance of Jamaican police, who have been supplying them with valuable intelligence on the Yardies. They also allegedly fear that if they disclose Green's confessions to murder, they

who wanted to keep their informer on the streets. Home Office guidelines forbid this. It is understood that Green has admitted that he routinely used a firearm, committed armed robberies, bought and sold large quantities of crack cocaine, and ran protection rackets in south London where he and his "crew" extorted money from black businesses. He was never prosecuted for any of these offences, and was finally brought to book only when he committed the armed robbery in Nottingham where his handlers were unable to protect him. At the end of the Leicester trial, on Green's evidence, Ro-

Mowlam formula for Irish talks

Patrick Wintour, Chief Political Correspondent

MO MOWLAM, the shadow Northern Ireland Secretary, yesterday urged the Government to separate talks on decommissioning of terrorist weapons from the main all-party talks on Northern Ireland. She said a parallel process held the best chance of the talks not breaking down. Her call, similar to one on Monday by Dick Spring, the Irish foreign minister, put her at odds with Tory backbench opinion and presaged her determination to speak her mind more often on Northern Ireland in the run-up to the election. Ms Mowlam's call for parallel talks was balanced with a



Labour's Mo Mowlam... at odds with backbench Tories warning to Martin McGuinness, the Sinn Fein leader, that he was mistaken if he thought a Labour government would act as the "7th Cavalry" for the republican para-

militaries by softening demands on the IRA to restore the ceasefire. In her clearest statement yet, Ms Mowlam said Labour supported Sinn Fein being allowed to join the all-party talks scheduled for June 10, as long as they win seats in the May 30 elections and restore the ceasefire of August 1994. "There are no other preconditions. If they restate the unequivocal ceasefire of August 1994, they should be allowed into talks," she said. She added that it should not be necessary for Sinn Fein to agree to the six Mitchell principles on non-violence before being allowed into June's talks — arguing instead that this commitment should be required at the start of the talks. She then broke with Tory

backbenchers and sided with Dublin by calling for decommissioning to be put into a separate, parallel talks process. Mr Spring made a similar call in a speech in Limerick on Monday, but Ms Mowlam said she had come to her position independently and denied it was intended to avoid the issue of decommissioning. "I am suggesting a process by which the decommissioning issue is addressed without handicapping progress on other issues, including trust and confidence-building." Some Unionists have said they will not talk face-to-face with Sinn Fein on June 10 until it at least signs up to the six Mitchell principles. But Ms Mowlam urged all political parties to meet in the same room on June 10 to discuss those principles.

Detective soothed bomber's family

David Sharrock and Duncan Campbell

THE family of the IRA bomber who blew himself up on a London bus were comforted by a senior Scotland Yard officer, their priest revealed yesterday. The unnamed inspector from the anti-terrorist branch spent 45 minutes with Edward O'Brien's parents at their home in Gorey, Co Wexford, Father Walter Forde told Irish radio yesterday. Father Forde, who denounced the IRA for involv-

ing the 21-year-old man in its England bombing campaign, said: "There was an inspector from Scotland Yard came over to deliver Ed's effects and the family had said to me that they would like me to be there. "He was a lovely man who was really sympathising with them. He wanted to deliver stuff personally rather than post it. They were a few small sort of effects." The items are understood to have included a crucifix given to O'Brien by his mother. O'Brien died when a bomb he was carrying ex-

ploded on a bus in Aldwych on February 18, a week after the Canary Wharf bomb ended the IRA ceasefire. His parents never suspected he was an IRA member. They issued a statement extending their sympathy to the eight people injured in the blast. Their demand that the IRA stay away from their son's funeral was ignored. Father Forde said that Miley and Margo O'Brien "were actually touched by the fact that he [the inspector] would come." He said the O'Brien family had

been buoyed up by thousands of sympathetic letters from England. A Scotland Yard spokesman last night confirmed that an officer from the anti-terrorist branch had returned O'Brien's personal effects and had spoken to the parents. It is not uncommon for anti-terrorist branch officers to meet the families of IRA men who were unaware of their sons' activities. "We don't hold any grudge — it's the old biblical saying of the sins of the fathers," said a police source.

Ministers 'turn deaf ear' to ideas on care in the community

David Brindle, Social Services Correspondent

MINISTERS were yesterday accused of turning a deaf ear to ideas which could help prevent more care-in-the-community tragedies. The criticism came from an inquiry team which investigated the killing of Jonathan Newby, a 22-year-old volunteer left in sole charge of an Oxford hostel for people with severe mental illness. The team, which reported

last summer, called on the Government to set national standards for the care of such patients. After some difficulty, it secured a meeting with John Bowis, junior health minister responsible for mental health policy. Nicola Davies, QC, the team's leader, said yesterday: "It would be fair to say that we met with a less than positive response." The team was now seeking to have included a crucifix given to O'Brien by his mother. O'Brien died when a bomb he was carrying ex-

ploded on a bus in Aldwych on February 18, a week after the Canary Wharf bomb ended the IRA ceasefire. His parents never suspected he was an IRA member. They issued a statement extending their sympathy to the eight people injured in the blast. Their demand that the IRA stay away from their son's funeral was ignored. Father Forde said that Miley and Margo O'Brien "were actually touched by the fact that he [the inspector] would come." He said the O'Brien family had

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Mystics and messiahs flood Water Margin

As the impact of communism on rural China wanes, people are returning to old beliefs and ancient rituals, Andrew Higgins writes. Peasant prophet and convicted rapist Wu Yangming was quick to leap into the ideological vacuum

IN THE mud-and-brick Chinese villages where 12th century outlaws inspired legends of a Chinese Robin Hood and their 20th century heirs brought the Communist Party to power, doomsday came earlier than planned. It arrived with a bullet in the back of the neck at the Bengbu municipal execution ground. There, four years before the end-of-millennium apocalypse promised to a multitude of followers, ended the extraordinary epic of Wu Yangming, peasant prophet, would-be Holy Emperor, convicted rapist and self-declared reincarnation of Jesus Christ. Aged 51 at the time of his death, the former peasant from Red Star Village led what officials now describe as the biggest network of "counter-revolutionary hoodlums" seen in China since Mao Zedong, another former "bandit", established himself as emperor of a new People's Republic in 1949. Mindful of its own past triumphs, the Communist Party has always seen peasants as a far more potent threat than students shouting half-digested democratic slogans imported from the West in Tiananmen Square. Deng Xiaoping's reforms have aggravated such fears.

The peasants, warns a celebrated tract, Looking at China through a Third Eye, have become a "living volcano". It adds: "If this vast army of ignorant, aimless and extremely destructive peasants is ever organised into an anti-government force, the government in power effectively will have already collapsed without any hope whatsoever of redemption." What unnerves Beijing about Wu and dozens of other would-be messiahs is that

and cult officers were known by titles like Master Mother, Golden Mother and Rose Mother. A code of discipline banned tight clothes, make-up, television, fruit, snacks and meals of more than two dishes. The only permitted drink was boiled water. Converts were expected to contribute at least 10 per cent of their possessions and money. The Three-Self Patriotic Church, the officially sanctioned guardian of protestantism in China, condemned the cult as heretical. An official

ment from society, the weakening of its structures in the countryside," said Robin Munro, Hong Kong head of Asia Watch and editor of a study of Chinese sects. Traditional forms of organisation have rushed in to fill the vacuum. The bedrock of Wu's cult lay in a swath of towns and villages stretching from northern Anhui into neighbouring Jiangsu and Shandong, a region plagued by floods - most recently in 1991 - and corrupt officials. A

Guangdong, adjoining Hong Kong. Wu found religion through the Shooters, a banned sect which regards a Taiwanese-American preacher as the Living Christ. Jailed for a year in 1987, he set up his movement on his release. Communist ideology has given way to an eclectic brew of Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism and folk religion. One proscribed but rapidly growing sect, the Way of Unity, worships Buddha, Ancestor Lu the Cave Dweller, Jesus, Mohammed and the Immortal Old Man of the South Pole. Also in vogue across China is the folk mysticism found in ancient texts such as the I Ching, a fortune-telling treatise known in English as the Book of Changes. "The last few years have seen all the classic elements of an end-of-dynasty syndrome," said Geremie Barbe, an Australian scholar of contemporary China. "Every time China begins to fall apart, the Book of Changes becomes the focal point of popular anxiety."



'Every time China begins to fall apart, the Book of Changes, the I Ching, becomes the focus of anxiety'

they might nurture the beginnings of such an organisation. According to religious groups in Hong Kong, China's official church, and the state-run media, Wu recruited converts throughout the country to a bizarre millenarian sect organisation, though, he mimicked Mao's early Communist Party, as well as older insurrectionary movements such as the 19th century Taiping, whose leader Hong Xiuquan claimed to be Jesus's younger brother. "Popular religion is a by-product of the Communist Party's increasing disengage-

ment from society, the weakening of its structures in the countryside," said Robin Munro, Hong Kong head of Asia Watch and editor of a study of Chinese sects. Traditional forms of organisation have rushed in to fill the vacuum. The bedrock of Wu's cult lay in a swath of towns and villages stretching from northern Anhui into neighbouring Jiangsu and Shandong, a region plagued by floods - most recently in 1991 - and corrupt officials. A

provincial campaign against graft three years ago implicated 300,000 cadres. The classic Ming Dynasty novel The Water Margin depicted the region as a lawless land of righteous peasant rebellion. Mao's Communist Party turned it into an early stronghold. In the villages around Bengbu, the town in Anhui where Wu was tried on 19 counts of rape and executed earlier this year, the sect had 11 cells. While rooted in the countryside, it also attracted converts from Shanghai and the southern province of

was an alien import from Russia. Its methods, he said, were as old as Chinese secret societies. Foreign campaigners argue, however, that China's blanket ban blurs the boundary between criminal and legitimate groups. "The more repressed, the more radicalised they become," said Mr Munro. "Chinese history is strewn with groups like this fighting back. The Taiping almost brought down the dynasty."

Extra security after gunman's life threatened

Christopher Zinn in Canberra

THE death toll in the Tasmanian massacre rose by one to 35 yesterday as police put the suspected killer Martin Bryant under extra guard in a Hobart hospital after threats to kill him were received. While Australians prepared to observe a minute's silence today, it was still not known what prompted the lone gunman to run amok in Port Arthur on Sunday afternoon. Police said there had been telephone threats against Mr Bryant, aged 28, and there were plans to move him from the Royal Hobart to a prison hospital. He is suffering from burns sustained when he fled a burning cottage at the end of the police siege. The hospital said that four of those injured in the shooting were still in a serious state, nine were stable, and five had been discharged. Mr Bryant, who has been described by neighbours as a loner, has so far been charged with one count of murder at a bedside court. At Port Arthur, forensic scientists discovered a third body in the ruins in the guest house where Mr Bryant held more than 200 police at bay. It is believed to be that of the third hostage taken. The police say they have accounted for all of the missing. They released the names of 24 of the dead who have been formally identified. Most came from Australia but two were Malaysian tourists. In Canberra, the opening of the federal parliament was overshadowed by the sense of national devastation. The governor-general, the Queen's representative, spoke of the profound sympathy of everyone in parliament for those affected by the tragedy. Today the prime minister, John Howard, and national leaders gathered in Hobart for a memorial service and a minute's silence. One man who was wounded in the drama spoke to reporters from his hospital bed. Peter Crosswell was in the Broad Arrow Cafe with two

friends when the gunman walked calmly in and proceeded to shoot everyone in the room with a high-powered military rifle. He described how the killer methodically shot down table after table and then went about with a word, finishing off survivors. Mr Crosswell, who was lying still over his two companions, said: "I could only see two other people alive, everyone else had horrific head wounds and was obviously dead." He broke down as he said he had no idea why the gunman had not come back to kill him. The Tasmanian police and public safety minister, Peter Beswick, announced plans to ban all military-style semi-automatic guns. He said Tas-

'Everyone had horrific head wounds and was obviously dead'

mania, which is reputed to have the slackest gun laws of the six states, would tighten legislation irrespective of the decisions made by the emergency meeting of state and federal police ministers next week. The New South Wales premier, Bob Carr, has called on the federal government to take over all gun laws from the states and institute a national buy-back campaign to reduce firearm numbers. Tasmania's director of public prosecutions has warned the state's media against printing photographs of the accused man and details of his background. Damien Bugg QC said the publication in most Australian newspapers of the man's picture, alongside headlines such as "This is the man" and "Face of a killer", could prejudice a fair trial. He said contempt proceedings against the media in Tasmania were possible, because the identity of the killer would be central to any trial.



Writing on the wall... A cyclist rides past a message to accused killer Martin Bryant sprayed on the Hobart hospital where he is being held. Capital punishment was last carried out in Australia in 1967

Instability revives Mobutu's fortunes

Chris McGreal reports from Kinshasa on the Zairean dictator's partial return to favour

PRESIDENT Mobutu Sese Seko was sneaked through a side gate of the Elysee palace to meet Jacques Chirac in Paris last week. But however shy France may be about admitting it, Zaire's dictator emerged from the meeting keen to let it be known that he is once again in favour in at least one European capital. After years of ostracism abroad and vilification at home, the future looks brighter for Mr Mobutu than at any time since he was pressured into ending one-party rule. Zaire's economy and what passes for government continue to crumble. But Mr Mobutu has exploited the incompetence of his opponents at home, and the competing interests of the major powers abroad, to win a degree of rehabilitation in the West and emerge as the favoured candidate for the presidential election which Zaire's nearly dysfunctional parliament has set for May 1997. Five years ago France and other Western donors halted aid to Zaire in frustration at President Mobutu's lack of commitment even to accountable, if not democratic, government. The loss of aid, combined with rising anarchy and a reign of terror by the military, sent the already declining economy into a tailspin and increased the political pressure on him. In 1993 parliament convicted him of high treason as he battled with the government of the then prime minister and opposition leader, Etienne Tshisekedi. But he proved adept at denying power to others, if not entirely retaining control for himself.

Exploiting some politicians' desire for money rather than power, he laced parliament with spoilers and used the military to keep alive fear and chaos on the streets. Then he sacked Mr Tshisekedi and cajoled parliament into confirming the dismissal. While Mr Tshisekedi continues to call himself prime minister, his office has been occupied for the past two years by one of Mr Mobutu's allies. Kengo wa Dondo was appointed because he poses little threat to the dictator. His failure to implement promised financial reforms and restore the rule of law have reinforced public disillusionment with politicians of all breeds. "The parliament decided that all important questions must be solved by consensus," Mr Kengo said. "But this is a means of blocking the normal function of the government and reform. They do not want anything to change." In the resulting vacuum, Mr Mobutu portrays himself as the one man who can hold the country together. "Our weary and disillusioned people no longer believe in the fine words and demagogic promises of their politicians," he said in a New Year's speech. He has been helped by weariness in Paris and Washington, squabbling among opposition politicians, and the emergence of more pressing regional concerns, which have led the US and France to buy quietly into the idea of Mr Mobutu as a stabilising influence. France's preoccupation with the implications of its loss of influence in Rwanda, and wider concerns in the West about growing instability elsewhere in central Africa, have provided new props for Zaire's dictator. The flood of Rwandan refugees into Zaire proved a useful excuse for Mr Mobutu to call off a presidential election last year. But with the opposition once again fragmenting, Mr Mobutu promised in Paris that the vote would go ahead this time.

An ORNAMENT

The MALT

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Dr Kohl's prescription

Germany's workers, the sick and pensioners will bear the brunt of the unbalanced austerity programme, reports Winfried Munster

Dr Kohl's prescription for trouble

Süddeutsche Zeitung

EVEN the minister who runs the German chancellor's office called the austerity programme unveiled before parliament last week "a package of social crudeness".

The head of the IG-Metall steel union, Klaus Zwickel, said the measures amounted to "a conspiracy against employment and social issues".

In reality, the very German attention to detail has to provoke a smile. When the coalition began to put together its "programme for growth and employment" the plan was to prepare the country for the 21st century. By the time they got to the end of it, they were bogged down in minute details, such as whether spectacle frames should be paid for by the state.

Clearly, Helmut Kohl and his coalition government are proud of all the details on which they managed to agree. The coalition set out to achieve two aims: to shave DM50 billion (£22 billion) from central government and regional spending while reviving the economy to create jobs.

The government did come up with several intelligent answers. To support young entrepreneurs through tax relief is standard practice in

many countries. To relax working legislation for companies of up to 10 people instead of five sounds reasonable. Previously the easier dismissal legislation applied to companies employing five or fewer. Often young businesses overlooked an opportunity for growth rather than hire a sixth person, who would force it to abide by tougher employment laws. The risk of being squeezed out of the market while being unable to make people redundant was too high for many.

The coalition also emphasises the importance of "flexitime", to create employment. But this could mean not working for a long time during a recession, and companies may themselves how much their investment in job training will be worth.

In effect, the government will make most savings on the backs of those with least influence: employees, the sick and pensioners. It may appear acceptable to reduce a salary in the case of sickness, but those who are still off work after six weeks might find it difficult to live with a 10 per cent cut in sick pay. The economic sense of social security should be to help where individual efforts fail, but the government is planning the opposite.

The programme to save money lacks coherence. It is

obvious that the coalition partners did not find a concept and merely settled for everything on which they could agree. Some of what they agreed on is merely a projection, such as the reform of income tax. And even if there was a concept behind the saving programme, the goal of saving DM50 billion amounts to little, and the price that must be paid by those who have to rely on social security is too high. Fundamentally, the austerity programme is unbalanced because employers do not have to contribute.

New jobs could come from deregulation. Nowadays foreign investors do not waste much time in investigating the possibility of opening a factory in Germany. The incredibly complicated building regulations see to that. Foreigners who have followed the struggle to ease regulations on shopping hours will smile wearily.

It may be that the time has come for a new partnership between employees and employer, where employees become co-owners of the company and associate their well-being with its. They will then help management to find modern, lucrative and job-creating technology.

But it looks as if the employers do not yet know that now it is their turn to give.



Too many doctors... Kohl and his coalition are proud of what they have agreed, but the prescription lacks logic. CARTOON: E.M. LANG/SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG

Scams aided by secrecy

The benefit fraudster is not just a creature peculiar to Britain. Germans have ways to cheat the system. **Reymer Klüver** reports

THE mayor of Pforzheim is so disenchanted with the way the social security system works locally that he has even written a book about it.

A Social Democrat, Joachim Becker is among German politicians who complain that a system set up to help in emergencies is being wrecked. Not only are more and more people relying on it for longer periods, abuse has spiralled.

With a population of 118,000, Pforzheim is one of the smallest towns in Germany but has 70,000 industrial jobs — among the highest in Baden-Württemberg. But Mr Becker says 6 per cent

of the townsfolk live on social security.

Aged just 27, Birgit Seeger's anger runs deep. The social security inspector is tired of combating benefit scammers. Among the most common, she says, is that of the broken washing machine which her office has to replace instantly. Then there are the claimants who "lose" their wallet immediately after cashing their giro, once or twice a year. They have to be paid again.

Abuse of the system is facilitated by Germany's strict protection of personal information: authorities, health and insurance institutions cannot compare data. Young

mothers are easily able to claim large benefits by claiming that they raise their children alone, and the social security office is unable to prove that this is a lie.

From his sixth floor office, Mr Becker watches the flow to and from the social security office. Living off benefits, he says, has become "a way of life". The welfare system is in ruins partly because there are many people who "hack their brains to find more ways of extracting money". Increasingly, there is a mentality in Germany that "one should cheat the state", he says.

Recently the unemployed were invited to participate in a scheme whereby a firm would employ them at cheap rates and the state would subsidise their wages. Only half were prepared even to discuss the scheme.

From the Süddeutsche Zeitung

Unions plan May Day show of strength

GERMAN unions hope to bring hundreds of thousands of people on to the streets in May Day protests today to challenge Helmut Kohl's plan for sweeping welfare cuts.

Herbert Mai, head of the OeTV union representing public servants who face a two-year pay freeze, threatened strikes if Bonn pushed through a cut in sick pay.

"If employers insist on this, a labour dispute will become inevitable," he said.

Ursula Engelen-Kiefer, deputy chairwoman of the DGB trade union federation, warned: "If employers think they can turn back the clock on pay policy and dismantle the welfare system, they will be responsible for the consequences." — Reuter.

Mayor cheated to help poor

Madrid is counting the cost as officials who rigged farm subsidies in rural Spain are finally being brought to justice

WHEN Juan Ferrandiz first appeared before the judge, accused of defrauding millions from development funds for poor agricultural regions, he broke down and wept. As he left the court, farm workers who had benefited from the scheme cheered the former mayor as a hero.

Some consider the case the worst abuse of a subsidy system which is regarded as a byword for political and financial corruption.

The court is demanding the return of 1,000 million pesetas (£5.2 million) from Mr Ferrandiz and seven other accused. Mr Ferrandiz denies the charge, but admits making it possible for the people of his village near Granada to receive welfare payments without meeting the legal requirements.

Some see him as the victim of a system which was set up by the first Socialist government, after the death of Franco, to alleviate the hardship of agricultural workers in depressed regions, especially Andalusia in the south and Extremadura in the east.

The plan for rural employment, which Spanish lawmakers say would be more accurately called the plan for rural unemployment — sets

aside funds for development projects to give people work and improve conditions in villages. Critics say the scheme rarely worked properly. To qualify for rural unemployment benefit, workers have to prove they have been employed for at least 40 days a year. Many municipal officials, like Mr Ferrandiz, have been accused of crediting villagers with days worked on PER-funded projects which were never actually begun, or in which far fewer than claimed were involved.

Mr Ferrandiz insists he acted "on humanitarian



power in Madrid after 13 years but still controls the regional administrations in Andalusia and Extremadura, has long been accused of turning a blind eye to PER scams — and even encouraging them — to win votes. Four years ago, however, faced by the need to reduce the budget deficit, the Socialists began to clamp down on welfare abuse.

So far most of those charged with PER fraud have received light sentences, but as a result of the trials mayors are realising that they have to apply the rules more strictly. The days when families began to claim agricultural unemployment benefit of around 60,000 pesetas a month each, without even trying to find work, are over.

Mr Ferrandiz's successor as mayor of Pinos Puente, a village some nine miles north of Granada, in the Vega valley, says that 1,700 people now claim benefit in the municip-

ality compared with 4,200 five years ago.

But the social problems remain. "There is a percentage of the population that is financially very weak; temporary workers who used to rely on occasional work which has largely disappeared as a result of new farming methods and competition from European Union and Moroccan imports.

The conservative Popular Party (PP), which won Spain's general election in March, has long accused the Socialists of setting up a system of hopeless dependency among these people. "I don't want Andalusia to be the land of subsidy fraud, lack of self-respect and no real future," says Javier Arenas, the Andalusian PP leader.

But there are doubts as to what the new government can do to change the situation. Since 1983, 1,000 billion pesetas have been invested in infrastructure in Andalusia, but unemployment at 33 per cent remains 10 per cent above the national average.

In the short term, policy is unlikely to change much, although the pressure for greater welfare cuts, so that Spain can meet EU single currency criteria, grows. Agricultural workers' fears that the PER would be eroded were mitigated, for the time being at least. The outgoing Socialist government, with the tacit approval of the new PP government, approved the PER expenditure of 17,500 million pesetas for the coming year — the same as this year.

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France's peace role deserves praise

Comment

Le Monde

FRANCE'S persistence has earned her the right to a dominant position in the solution to the Lebanese crisis. With

Washington, Beirut and Damascus, France will be part of the "supervision group" overseeing the ceasefire that took effect on April 27. France must be congratulated.

Of course, the sceptics will say the United States played the main role and is the main guarantor. Lebanon and Israel are respecting the rules which the US laid down for this new military game. To some extent, we are dealing with a return to the status quo that prevailed before the not so glorious but extremely murderous and destructive Israeli operation.

The Americans have taken care to make no financial engagement for the reconstruction of the civilian infrastructures destroyed by the Israeli bombardments. Once again, the Europeans will have to financially support the Middle East.

It is here that the French intervention makes sense. On the whole, the Europeans have for many years

accused the US of being the sole mediator in the Middle East peace process, and of restricting them to a role of "peace bankers" while not letting them have any say. The European Union was, in fact, in charge of the cheque book but only had an observer's seat at the negotiation table. It is, therefore, totally justifiable that France, which has been linked to Lebanon for such a long time, plays an important part in the peace process.

But France still has its limitations. It is only part of

the "supervision group" because Syria and Lebanon insisted on that.

France was not chosen by Israel, which has no confidence either in France or in Europe. This is the EU's problem in the Middle East. To be a mediator and have a proper place at the negotiation table with the Israelis as the US, you must be invited by both warring parties. Despite the positive role played by Paris in the most recent Lebanese drama, this is still not the case, either for France or the EU.

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Grave error of judgment
The blame in the Carr case is widely spread

NEVER has a single case so glaringly exposed the frailties of two separate and crucial systems of care: child protection, and the treatment of people with severe personality disorders. Darren Carr's story, which was set out in our G2 section yesterday, is not only a challenge to national and local policy-makers but also to the psychiatric profession, which still remains divided over whether personality disorders can be treated. The gist of the case is almost unbelievable: a seriously psychopathic patient, who was compulsorily detained in a mental hospital after making several serious attacks on his mother and her partner, is discharged and ends up in Oxfordshire acting as a live-in child-minder to two children who had already been on an "at risk" register because of the inadequacies of their mother. Local teachers accurately reported that Carr was beating one child but Carr was cleared by a social worker who belatedly investigated the allegations. Days later Carr pours petrol outside the bedrooms of the mother and her two children and sets fire to the house. All three die in the blaze. Carr pleaded guilty to three manslaughter charges on Monday and will be sentenced later.

manager sacked. In reality the failure of the child protection service for all its catastrophic results, is less serious than the gap in mental care for a simple reason. At least there was a child protection system in place with teachers, relatives and hospital social workers getting in touch with the social workers protecting the children. What went wrong was a series of individual errors. But in terms of Carr's mental care, there was no system just a black hole. The crux of the problem in the Carr case is the division within the psychiatric profession. There is no common definition of personality disorder or agreement on what constitutes a psychopathic disorder. Yet people can only be detained against their will under the Mental Health Act if they are a danger to themselves or suffer from a treatable offence. That is why, like the earlier Buchanan case, Carr was discharged. In the words of the Buchanan inquiry: discharging a person time after time is simply "an offence waiting to happen". It is time the profession got its act together. But ministers are not blameless. Belatedly they have launched a new form of asylum, small care homes with 24-hour support, to meet the needs of the seriously mentally ill who need long-term care. As the report into the killing of Jonathan Zito by Christopher Clunis noted: "If the needs of this small group are not met, care in the community will be discredited." Contrary to popular belief, the number of people killed by mental patients has not increased. It is just the inquiries which make it seem so, as the Psychiatric Bulletin reports today. But the patients do need care. Ironically, Oxford has improved its mental health training — as the chairwoman of the inquiry into its last scandal noted yesterday. Yet ministers remain uninterested. Worse still, they still refuse to provide the best protection: national standards.

Buying a stake in the golden hen
Hong Kong's worries are political rather than economic

WHEN CHRIS Patten gives his farewell party in Hong Kong, will he need to turn out his own lights? Yesterday the governor explained that Britain may have to settle for a separate ceremony. It is the return to the motherland, not the departure of the colonialists, which the Chinese wish to celebrate with fireworks. Mr Patten and friends may still throw a big party on the lawn of Government House but there could be a lot of unmetan canapés. On the eve of power shifting to the new owners, quite a few invites may find that they have another pressing engagement. In the scale of Hong Kong's transitional uncertainties, this is a small dispute but a deeply symbolic one. At least till the trauma of the Beijing massacre there was an inclination to minimise the extent of change. The old cliché about China's interest in not frightening the gold-laying hen was frequently invoked. By now the people of Hong Kong have fully accepted Chairman Mao's advice to "cast away illusions". It is probably just as well. Much more significant for Hong Kongers is this week's transaction which has considerably increased mainland Chinese holdings in Hong Kong's flagship airline Cathay Pacific, and in its subsidiary Dragonair. This is wholly unsurprising: China will want to ensure a substantial stake in other Hong Kong growth areas too — particularly telecommunications — not only to show who is boss but because Beijing has its own vested financial interests

which want a share. Nor should we shed a tear for the great British hong whose privileged positions go back to the age of the opium trade. It is probably better for China to buy into the airlines rather than — as previously threatened — set up its own rival operation. The only imperative is that the competing interests in Beijing should not get too greedy and swallow so much that confidence — not least of the travelling public — is destroyed. Hong Kong's real anxieties as the handover approaches are political much more than economic — which is probably why most foreign bankers and domestic fat cats fail to appreciate them. The concern is how strong the rule of law and democracy will be after 1997 and this is where China's actions cause most alarm. Beijing now argues that its commitment to preserve Hong Kong under alteration for 50 years only applied to the Hong Kong of 1984 — before Britain initiated its belated democratic reforms. Beijing seems to believe it can buy into the rule of law and democracy as if it were Cathay Pacific. It may not be so easy if the Hong Kong democrats refuse to be silenced. Last week the Chief Secretary Anson Chan returned from talks in Beijing where she met the senior Chinese official responsible for Hong Kong. The capable Ms Chan has only an outside chance of becoming the post-handover governor. China could revive hopes of a better future if she were allowed to turn the lights back on after Mr Patten.

A man's mortgage is his castle
But this won't necessarily stop the Chancellor from raiding it

ONE of the biggest social changes of our time is the roaring success of owner-occupation. At the turn of the century over 90 per cent of dwellings were rented. As recently as 1951 more than half of all households were privately rented. Now 70 per cent are owner-occupied with no sign of a reversal. High rates of ownership have little to do with prosperity. Switzerland, one of the richest countries in the world has one of the lowest ownership rates while Bangladesh one of the highest. The stampede to own your own house in the UK was the result of big tax shelters for owners (mortgage interest relief, no taxes on capital gains or imputed rents) combined with cheap sales of council property. Ownership was greatly encouraged by the booming credit conditions of the 1980s which pushed house prices up so quickly that at one stage many people were "earnings" more from capital appreciation on their houses

than they were in their day jobs. The interesting question is whether people will want to carry on owning their houses now that the Government has switched subsidies from houses to financial assets and while house prices have not recovered from the recent slump. The answer, according to the current issue of Which, is that owner-occupation is still better than renting. It found that in every region of Britain the monthly cost of paying rent on a one-bedroomed flat was greater than the cost of servicing a 25 year mortgage at 8 per cent. In Greater London rentals were over £250 a month more than mortgage payments. And if house prices start to rise again even modestly then it will be an added bonus for owner-occupiers. All of this may tempt some future revenue-hungry chancellor to argue that owner occupation will retain its attraction without any subsidies at all.



Letters to the Editor

Families and how to revive them

PATRICIA MORGAN'S vision of the family is Luddite (A time for women, April 29). She implies that all change in the form of the family is bad for children (who are now as sacred as pensioners were before they became too expensive). But children grow up to be adults: would they endorse Morgan's repression of women and single adults for the sake of the Family? There are huge cultural changes afoot, with "good" and "bad" consequences. Patricia Morgan would stamp them out with big-brotherish fiddling with taxes to "reward" the married. But isn't traditional-style marriage its own reward — good for all involved, and also supplying the breadwinner with unpaid wifely services that underpin the state, the economy and society, as well as the breadwinner's career and pension (which in the UK he can keep, solo, on divorce)? There was a brief historical period — the post-second-world-war social settlement — when the so-called traditional family (urban, middle class) became a possibility for everyone. The context was economic boom and a new welfare state. Before that

there was war and promiscuity; before that, for centuries, working people postponed marriage and sex until their mid- to late-twenties. Women were punished for illicit pregnancy and men depended on poor women for prostitute services. That was "tradition", and I bet no one would vote to restore it. Dr Nerys Thomas Patterson, Research Fellow, Centre for Social Policy Research and Development, University of Wales, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 2DG.

of the married man's allowance must explain why, in order to support marriage, the family and children, the tax system should be used to support men as husbands irrespective of the income (earned or unearned) of their wives and whether or not they have responsibility for children. Subsidising men as husbands is not an effective way to support children or those who care for them. (Prof) Hilary Land, Centre for Family Policy, University of Bristol, 8 Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1TN.

IN criticising feminists in the '70s who argued for the abolition of the married man's tax allowance (as it was then), Patricia Morgan fails to point out we also argued that the resulting increased revenue should be used to increase child benefit. Eleanor Rathbone argued forcefully that children were the responsibility of both their parents and the wider society. From this it followed that the state should share the economic costs of all children. But now, in contrast to her time, there is a debate about how fathers could be encouraged to share the responsibility of child-rearing. Now that we know that differing family forms can still produce people whose

relationships, obligations and responsibilities allow society to function", why doesn't Patricia Morgan encourage more men to adjust to and support female equality, instead of nervously offering up yet more female sacrifices? Tina Frealey, 22 Park Avenue South, London N8 8LS.

THE National Children's Bureau has never, as Patricia Morgan suggests, agreed that "parental care must be superseded by specialised child-rearing institutions". Indeed, we have consistently championed the needs of parents — fathers as well as mothers — and argued that they should be given greater support and a higher status in society. There is growing evidence to suggest that, at its best, nursery education can significantly aid a child's social, emotional and intellectual development. We would argue, however, that it serves to enhance parental care, not act as a substitute, as Ms Morgan's austere vision implies. (Dr) Gillian Fugh, National Children's Bureau, 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE.

Shelve the Defamation Bill

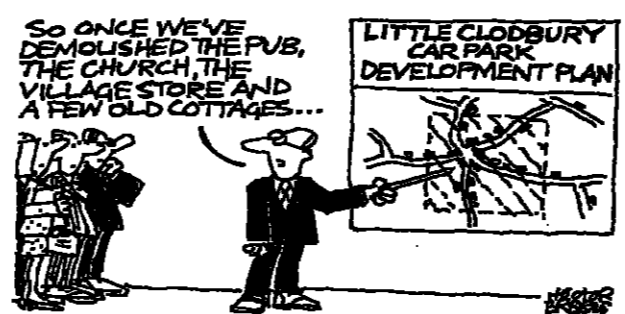
GEORGE MONBIOT'S attack on Britain's archaic libel laws is spot on (Law that muddles truth and fiction, April 29). The Defamation Bill does little to change the basic injustices that favour the rich and powerful. The law as it affects booksellers and distributors is even more scandalous. We can, and do, get sued for libel for selling a publication produced by someone else. In effect this becomes a legalised form of blackmail since the cost of mounting a defence in court can reach tens of thousands of pounds. It can be cheaper to settle out of court than to challenge the allegations of libel. Of course, it would be even cheaper to refuse to stock the "offending" publication.

This is not a wild nightmare. It is happening now to ourselves and other radical bookshops facing a series of legal actions for stocking the anti-fascist magazine, Searchlight. Already one or two have been intimidated out of stocking it for fear of the prohibitive legal defence costs. This is political censorship of a whole new dimension. We cannot afford to employ lawyers to check for libel in every book or magazine that comes through our doors. The Defamation Bill must remove booksellers and distributors from the frame altogether. Neal Smith, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2DE.

ALONE litigator with a grudge against a particular small-circulation magazine can not only sue that magazine for libel, but can sue any shop which allegedly stocked it. In the case of the dwindling number of small independent shops which are increasingly necessary to ensure a plurality of debate — the cost of a defence can mean bankruptcy. This is the case even if the defence is successful, if the litigator can't pay the defendant's costs. All that the Defamation Bill does is to put such a shop's existing "innocent dissemination" defence, currently based on precedent, on to a statutory footing. It still leaves the onus of proof of "innocent dissemination" on the shop, which can therefore still be bankrupted in the process, and it still puts no restraint on a spiteful impoverished litigator pursuing people who are peripheral to his or her complaint. Albert Beale, Housemans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1.

Save our seals

I THOUGHT the Spanish had retreated a wrong die to seals (Spanish right seals pact, April 29) until I read the report. What a wonderful language is English: can any other compete with such misunderstandings as the wartime classic, "British push bottles up 3,000 Germans" (Dr) Michael Staunton, Pear Tree Cottage, The Lane, Little Street, Yoxford, Saxmundham, Suffolk IP17 3JJ.



Not so common in Clapham

I'M surprised that your reporter was unable to create any serious perspectives in his article on Clapham's road-sign controversy (Village vandal strikes again to fight change, April 30). Tourism helps to maintain essential services like the village shop and post office and is therefore welcomed by most local people. The problem with over-developing tourism is that what people come to enjoy is eventually destroyed. It provides only short-term returns and, for entrepreneurs selling souvenirs or non-essential items, has to be over-primed in the summer to enable them to survive the winter. Central to objections to the new signs on the A65 is the fact that they will attract only

tourists in cars or coaches. Congestion in small villages soon becomes intolerable and larger car parks are built to accommodate the increased traffic. The result is that many serious walkers and ramblers thereafter avoid the village and are replaced by casual day-trippers with a consumerist ethic. To label a working village like Clapham "the Jewel of the Dales" is itself an expression of opportunistic vulgarity. Reporting such issues in a personalised way only reinforces the ersatz quaintness that is projected on to local people. Graham Mort, The Beeches, Riverside, Clapham, via Lancaster LA2 8DT.

Euro-ha-ha

STEPHEN BATES describes self-government, opening up to the world, and cutting the chains dragging us down to the world's low-growth unemployment blackspot as entrapment in a bunker, but it's difficult to tell whether his article is meant to be serious, funny or just another piece of Guardian Euro-tripe (Back in the Bunker, G2, April 30). If it's meant to be funny, then Euro-Ha. It will be a great entry in some Belgian joke book. If serious, then it does manage to be funny. Having halved our growth rate and quipped our unemployment by going in, it would hardly be fair to end the help we're giving to their economies by ruining ours. The sanctions Bates fears seem too like what's happening already to frighten people. So why doesn't he mention the sanctions they have in reserve? They could reduce the £6bn annual contribution. He'll be making by then. They could stop sending us their overpriced food. They could even deprive us of the manufactured goods which are destroying our jobs. Justin Mitchell MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

Who's the cleverest of us all?

RICHARD LYNN (Letters, April 25) would, of course, support Christopher Brand as this is precisely the poisoned "science" to which he too exposes his students. While students should be capable of making an informed judgment, it is nonetheless the case that there are people who are merely encouraged in their extreme and insular attitudes by the publication of divisive and racist propaganda. Lynn argues that his subject is becoming taboo. However, it is also conceivable that most people don't actually care who scores highest in a culturally biased IQ test. Rebecca Stuzell, Oakdale Road, London SE15.

As a student of Chris Brand's during my undergraduate years at the University of Edinburgh I had numerous confrontations with him. His ideas were as objectionable then as they are now. However, I am strongly

opposed to the banning of his book The G Factor and the calls to sack him. I cannot help but conclude that the reaction to Brand has nothing to do with anti-racism but everything to do with today's suffocatingly censorious politically correct climate. We cannot deal with arguments that we find objectionable by sweeping them under the carpet. I do not believe Brand's ideas are that dangerous — that students cannot handle his ideas gives him far too much credit. I cannot remember any of my fellow students being taken in by what he was arguing. Helen Goldberg, Oxford Road, Manchester M13.

A Country Diary

NORTH NORFOLK: It was one of those spring sunsets that always seem to hatch extravagant schemes and promises. The first swallows were wheeling round the cottage, the nightingales were back on Salthouse Heath, and there was a birthday supper to plan for the weekend. I'd taken to browsing rather tipsily, on red dead-nettle tops and rashly offered to make a wild vegetable stir-fry — a proverbial "mess of greens" — as a starter. It turned out better than I dared expect for a chilly April's end. The sea-spinach wasn't quite at its tangy best yet, but gave the bass note of iodine and sunken wrecks. For ballast, and some quite palpable fibre, I added yards of goosegrass, and for colour and fugitive side flavours there were dead-nettles, dandelions (flowers and leaves) and hedge-garlic. But the real hit was that naturalised Roman pot-herb, alexanders, currently rampant in hedgebanks all round the coast. Serendipity lent a small

hand. Because several of the guests hadn't eaten quite so natively before, I felt it should be cooked separately and issued with a warning about its high, angelica aroma. I also blanched it before steaming, the first time I had bothered with such a refinement. It transformed the whole plant, making scented asparagus of the stems and cocktail broccoli of the flowerheads. There was just one thing that took some of the savour away. Near the sea-wall where the sea-spinach grows, the tide-line was littered with the desiccated corpses of sea-birds — razor-bills, guillemots, eider ducks and still iridescent eider-down, and whole flocks of pitiably misshapen knot — all dashed here by the terrible storm-tides that hit Norfolk in February. This is the time that winter exacts to make spring work. But it is a hard price to pay, and for a me at least, made that spring food seem less than free. RICHARD MABEY

Handwritten text in a box at the bottom of the page, possibly a signature or a note.

Diary
Matthew Norman

SPOTTED hiding behind a curtain, at a paternal-childcare conference in London yesterday, was a figure of unwonted spruceness. The wearer of a spotless three-piece tweed suit was Bob Geldof. He was there, he told organisers of "Men and their Children", because he feels passionately that fathers can bond with their offspring as well as mothers. It seems his lawyers have told him that, because of his gender, he has little chance of winning custody of his daughters — Peaches, (11) Trixie, and Platyus Toddler — when he is divorced from Mrs Yates, and he is furious. Whether a custody battle will ensue is unclear; if so, his appeal to the judge might be worth bearing. "Just give me the f--- kids. I need the f--- kids, right, so just give them to me now." Well, who knows? It worked for him once before.

THE Diary sends regards to Brian Silcock, whose retirement as "operations chief" of the Sunday Times was met with the news that, due to "financial pressures", the company was unable to provide any champagne for his leaving do. Mr Silcock worked for the Sunday Times for 34 years.

DESPITE the Guardian's report that he has been a little too cute with the crime figures, nothing seems likely to end the world Mail on Sunday campaign for Michael Howard to become Tory leader; yet another puff ("Howard's way in front") appeared on Friday. Since no one seriously rates his chances — Mr Howard is regarded, after all, as the world's most competent interior minister since Callaghan's horse became Caligula — what on earth explains it? The answer, I gather, is Oswald, the white cotton handkerchief which has the role of mentor to MoS editor Jonathan Holborow. "It all began at a recent lunch," says MoS executive, wearily. "Howard had one of his colds, and was forced to borrow Oswald. The two got on famously [the handkerchief, named after Sir Oswald Nisely, is firmly of the right], and now that Oswald's virtually taken over as editor..."

IN the wake of the collapse of its Arabic TV service, the BBC is striving to find work for those made redundant. Journalists are especially thrilled at a document pointing out vacancies in Hong Kong, with the Disney Channel.

FOR those awaiting the itinerary of Manly Mandelson's Easter trip to the Far East — the £6,000 bill for air tickets and hotels was sweetly picked up by Barclays Bank — the news is disappointing. Details of the high-level business meetings, each strengthening trade links between Hartlepool and the Orient, have yet to arrive. But I'm sure it won't be long now.

IN the Daily Mail, sane and rational Paul Johnson addresses the imminent slaughter of cattle. "Cows are not just statistics," he writes. "They are God's creatures... In their own way they are beautiful. The colour of a fine Charolais is superb. The velvety texture of a prime Jersey makes one catch one's breath in wonder." Keen for more, we rang to ask his opinion of the yak. "I don't know anything about them," said Paul (as if this "and no, I know nothing about Hamas either." Paul is moving away from meat, he says, and will soon be vegetarian. "As I get older, I am more and more overwhelmed by the wonder of life and God's creation. I'd never deliberately eat a beastie." (It will be saffron robes and chanting next) "and when I was swimming in the Caspian Sea once, I found a scorpion in my shoe, but I let it get away. And once I met a tarantula in my hotel room. I'd never kill a spider. I think spiders are wonderful."

ONE of history's longest conflicts ends on Saturday, when hostilities between Sweden and San Marino officially cease 350 years after they first went to war. Please God, never again.



Beginning of the end of an era

Commentary John Gray

THE Tory end-game has begun. The rejection by John Major, during Chancellor Kohl's visit to Britain on Monday, of rightwing demands to rule out in advance Britain's joining a single European currency will be remembered as a defining moment in the undoing of Conservatism. The Prime Minister's remark that a majority of the electorate would vote against joining, in a referendum, is an admission that he is now hostage to his own party on this issue rather than an estimate of British public opinion. There are other signs that the Conservative Party is nearing the brink of a historic split: the leaked survey of members of the 92 Group of Tory rightwingers disclosing that up to 100 of them are preparing to fight the next general election on pledges to oppose a single European currency and institute a wide-ranging referendum on Britain's relations with the EU.

John Major's strategy of bridging the divisions within his party on Europe has always been to hold to a policy of steadfast trimming and unalterable ambiguity. That strategy has already failed. The effect of Sir James Goldsmith's brilliantly executed political intervention can only be to accelerate a break-up of the Conservative coalition that is long overdue. Yet any split in the Tory party will be over much more than policy on Europe. It will be a parting of the ways between irreconcilably opposed kinds of rightwing thought and practice. It will signal unmistakably the end of anything resembling traditional Toryism. It will also mean the disintegration of the Tory political machine that has ruled Britain for three-quarters of the last 150 years.

Matters of political doctrine or history are far from the minds of Tory MPs at present. Electoral survival is the dominant concern, and sheer panic the prevailing emotion. Those who are proposing to accept the party at the general election as a dissident Eurosceptic manifesto do so in a last effort to save their seats. Many hope by the threat of rebellion force John Major and his Cabinet supporters to accept terms of the Eurosceptic manifesto.

This is a gamble of desperation based on the slenderest of calculations. There is probably no one who imagines that adopting radically Eurosceptic policies can now save off the Conservatives. The objective of the rightwing is to prevent a defeat by becoming a full-scale catastrophe. They fear a cataclysmic wipe-out, followed by a generation in opposition to that which signified the Tories in 1906 after he minister Arthur Balfour called to bridge their divide over Tariff Reform. At the same time many rightwingers welcome defeat as a reprieve from a party leader which they despise and against which they have applied since Mrs Thatcher won the strategic interest of Tory right has favoured a rightwing agenda.

It will mean the disintegration of the Tory machine that has ruled for three out of four of the last 150 years

The Tory right rejects the EU as a fetter on the sovereign nation-state. It is also committed to a minimum government which does nothing to impede the workings of the unfettered global market. Rightwingers such as John Redwood have not yet perceived that national sovereignty means little when the

market economy be reconciled with social cohesion? Current Conservative thought has nothing useful to say about these dilemmas.

The Tory right rejects the EU as a fetter on the sovereign nation-state. It is also committed to a minimum government which does nothing to impede the workings of the unfettered global market. Rightwingers such as John Redwood have not yet perceived that national sovereignty means little when the

Failures that led to the death of a family



Isabel Hilton

IT WAS one night in July 1995 that Susan Hearmon died, along with her two daughters, aged six and four. They were killed when their home was set ablaze by a man who had lived with them for six months as the children's baby-sitter. The family's home life was not ideal; the girls were born of different fathers to a mother who could scarcely look after them. But the immediate agent of their deaths was Darren Carr, a young man who was known to suffer a severe disorder and who had a history of becoming a thoroughly neo-liberal and nationalist party. Such a party is not easily electable in Britain — unless Labour too divides in the crucial area of its dealings with the EU.

It was dangerous man and that the family was at risk. Yet they did not tell Susan Hearmon that the man who was looking after her children had attacked his own mother with a hammer, or that, following the voices in his head, he had taken to the streets of Reading one night with a kitchen knife. Knowing all that, the social worker who belatedly visited the family after being alerted to Carr's history, and to the fact that one of the children had complained that he had attacked her, reported that he was "in control and totally caring as far as the children were concerned". Those children are now dead because Oxford Social Services behaved with a laxity and incompetence that defies belief, and because Carr fell into that bureaucratic safe haven — a grey area in the law. It is for Oxford Social Services to account for their failings. The social worker concerned has resigned after he was discovered to have failed to follow basic procedures. The grey area in the law that allowed Darren Carr his liberty long after he was recognised as a dangerous man persists. The question is: can it, or should it, be changed? It arises out of the distinction — a pretty technical one for Darren Carr's victims — between what psychiatrists, and therefore the law, regard as a mental illness, and those conditions they define as personality disorder. The phenomena that go towards a



Brutal cost of the Bill

Jane Deighton and Sadiq Khan, below, argue that recent record damages awarded against the Metropolitan Police are clear signals that the court won't tolerate flagrant miscarriages of justice

IN THE last three weeks juries have awarded record damages of £220,000, £108,000 and £302,000 against the Metropolitan Police Commissioner. They should not surprise us. Damages paid by the Commissioner for the unlawful acts of his officers have been rocketing over the past few years. He paid £393,000 in 1986 and £1,560,000 last year. And, let's face it, many of these "unlawful acts" are crimes to you and me. More of that later.

disciplined. If the police believed we were lying on oath we would expect to be prosecuted. What does the Commissioner think he is doing letting those officers go unpunished? The jury's message was until you take steps to deal with officers you believe are covering up for their mates, cover-ups will continue.

Police Complaints Authority. However, it often appears to operate on the side of the police. Take for instance the PCA's attitude to complainants who wish both to complain about police behaviour with the hope of securing disciplinary action, and to sue with the hope of securing compensation. Many of those complainants are advised by solicitors like myself to pursue the civil action first so that they have the advantage of their complaints being investigated by lawyers on their behalf rather than by police officers on the Commissioner's.

Officers prosecuted, none disciplined

AS the solicitor who acted for Kenneth Hays... awarded £220,000 a month after a jury decided he had been assaulted and wrongly arrested — I am sure that jury's decision was a reward such a high figure for exemplary damages. This was well done and a rarity. PC Trigg was one of only 54 officers to be sacked in 1992 — out of

for the assault, false imprisonment and racial abuse dished out to Mr Hays. The record for the damages awarded has been broken twice in a month; it will continue to be broken until the Commissioner finally heeds juries' findings. Sadiq Khan is a solicitor at the Christian Fisher partnership

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Finance Guardian

NatWest to cut more jobs

'We make too many mistakes'

Patrick Donovan
City Editor

NATWEST yesterday told staff that the bank makes "too many mistakes" and offers a service which "is no better than some competitors who charge less" as it unveiled plans for a major efficiency drive which looks set to see the loss of thousands of jobs.

In internal documents being circulated to its 48,000 strong workforce, the bank took the highly unusual step of admitting that it risks losing market share to more efficient rivals.

It refused to speculate on how many jobs face the axe. But management and unions are in the process of negotiating measures to help out casualties which could include radical steps such as helping fund redundant staff to take degrees at university.

According to the policy document, Building a new Retail Bank. NatWest says urgent action is needed to restructure because "our customers are changing the way they bank". At the same time, the document warns that it faces increased competition from the likes of Abbey National, a merged Lloyds/TSB, together with Virgin, First Direct and Save and Prosper.

The bank needs to be turned around by a major rationalisation programme, which will include:

- Reducing the number of paper processing and administrative centres from 150 to just 50 and
- Shutting another 350 branches to leave a nationwide network of 1,750.

NatWest aims to concentrate on building up investment in 700 key branches as well as extending networks of cash dispensers and telephone banking services. The result will be that far more of its staff will work directly with customers.

The bank's document says: "Currently a minority of our staff are dedicated to dealing directly with customers face to face or over the telephone and this will change substantially. By the year 2000 it will be almost two-thirds of our smaller workforce".

The programme, which can be achieved over the next three years, will result in the bank continuing to lose more jobs than we can create. But NatWest, which has already axed 18,000 staff over the past five years, refused to speculate on the likely number of redundancies, although there will be no new compulsory redundancies during the remainder of the year.

According to the document the bank is anxious "to avoid unhelpful headlines and speculative scare stories in the press which will cause concern to you and to our customers".

But unions welcomed the bank's willingness to liaise over the job cuts. Rory Murphy, of the NatWest Staff Association, was particularly pleased at the possibility of the bank offering redundant staff help with studying at university or other alternatives to full-time working.

Bifu, the banking and finance union, said: "NatWest have given a commitment to fully involve staff and unions in managing the proposed changes. This is a complete departure from previous arbitrary job cuts. We welcome NatWest's attempts to minimise the impact on staff by involving staff and unions from the outset".

The document, drawn up by NatWest retail banking chief Tony Warren, states: "We are just not as efficient as we need to be. The bank admits that it faces a growing threat from changes among its competitors."

"The effects of these changes are that our best customers are being targeted by competitors with lower costs than ours. The alternative is not to maintain current levels of profit and competitiveness, but to suffer a serious and sustained decline in both".

Notebook

Caught napping? Install a cashpoint



Edited by Alex Brummer

BEHIND the headline figures of branch closures and lost jobs at Britain's biggest domestic bank, NatWest, is the fascinating admission that changes in the financial sector are undermining its competitive edge.

A circular to staff acknowledges that NatWest has been caught napping by a series of changes in domestic banking: the conversion of building societies like Abbey National; mergers such as that between Lloyds and TSB; and the arrival of new brands in the financial marketplace like Virgin, First Direct and Save and Prosper.

As NatWest's operation chief for UK banking Tony Warren bluntly puts it: "The effect of these changes is that our best customers are being targeted by competitors with lower costs than ours."

To address the problem, NatWest is planning an extensive restructuring with a clear focus on automation. Among the changes planned are more cash machines in more locations; use of swipe cards for counter transactions; electronic data storage and automated lending so that all documentation and fee charging could be handled eventually by computer.

Hopefully, NatWest will also look at the excessive arrangement fees it currently charges.

Plainly, with the high street becoming more crowded and competitive — as the current battle for mortgage and savings business demonstrates — NatWest needs to make the changes to maintain its market advantage. It deserves credit for seeking to carry them out in a reasonably humane way with an early warning system of major changes; advanced notices of voluntary redundancy and the promise of university education for some of those discarded.

What a pity, though, that the first that many staff heard of the likely job losses was over the radio.

Pensions jackpot

FIRMS may grumble that the outcome of the long-running battle over disclosing directors' pensions will result in extra work, extra cost and confusion. But even if that is true, it is worth it — as with all the corporate governance improvements of the past few years which have exposed routine abuses.

The Cadbury Committee, the Greenbury Committee, and now the Hampel Committee, came into existence because of abuses of board powers among other things, because directors were paying themselves too much through risk-free options and

unearned bonuses. If those shareholders had not existed, it would be possible to do without all the extra rules and the copious disclosure.

Pensions is the last, and most complex, of the issues raised by the Greenbury committee on top pay, which reported last summer. The committee made certain that pay increases would be fully reported in a company's annual accounts. But its members also realised that shareholders should also be able to see the effect on directors' pensions of those increases.

Greenbury called for simple, understandable annual reporting of how directors' pension arrangements had changed during the year. That has not been simple to achieve, despite the best efforts of the actuaries. The real problem is that in many companies the resulting figures are embarrassingly large.

The actuaries' preferred calculation method was criticised as producing "volatile" figures. But the difficulty was that it produced benefit figures ten times the size of the alternative approach. If directors do not like those figures, the solution is not nearly as difficult as the task of calculating the statistics. The solution is to stop abusing their power. Final year pay rises for retiring directors result in huge costs. That should be disclosed, as will now happen. Even better, such huge rises should not be paid, or pensions should be based on figures which average the last few years' pay.

Ferry wars

ON the face of it, P&O's quarterly statistics yesterday were awful, with passengers down on the Dover-Calais route down by almost a fifth.

Beneath the surface, the picture is not quite so bad, with some of the other figures released, such as those for P&O's cruise line operations, looking healthier.

The fall on the Dover-Calais route was to be expected, and will continue — at least in the short term — as Eurotunnel edges closer to its natural market share.

More exciting over coming months will not be whether P&O can claw back some of this market share, but whether it will finally make its long-expected challenge to government restrictions stopping it from tie-ups with rival ferry operators, like Stena.

A full merger between P&O and Stena is not the answer. But the ferry operators, such as marketing and reservation systems, certainly could be.

Lang devalues Euro currency

Larry Elliott and Richard Thomas

THE Government's hardening opposition to a single currency was underlined yesterday when the Trade Secretary, Ian Lang, joined forces with Bank of England Governor Eddie George in stressing that Britain could survive outside monetary union.

Mr George said Europe's high unemployment meant the single-currency project was fraught with risk, adding that the UK should only join if it looked like it was going to be a "safe club".

Meanwhile Mr Lang, one of the Prime Minister's closest allies in Cabinet, outlined a crusade for global free trade within 25 years.

The Governor said he was nervous about the tight timetable for a single currency, because Europe's long dole queues made it very difficult to know whether countries had converged sufficiently and would "stzy on an even keel with each other".

Speaking on BBC Radio 2's Jimmy Young programme, Mr George said the final decision would be a matter for politicians.

But he added: "Economically, I think the issue for us when the time comes is going

to be whether or not this is a safe club to join."

If it looked as though the tough criteria for joining the Euro on debt, budget deficits, inflation and exchange rates, did not look sustainable it would be in Britain's interest to stay outside, he said.

Britain could survive, and maybe even thrive, as long as it did not regard remaining outside the Euro as an excuse not to pursue disciplined macro-economic policies.

Mr Lang, speaking to the British-American Chambers of Commerce, said: "We have become too focused on the European issue at the expense of our place on the wider scene."

In a clear nod to the sceptical wing of his party, he said: "As well as making ourselves the Enterprise Centre of Europe, I want to position Britain as the world leader in driving a global movement to tear down barriers to trade."

Highlighting the £40 billion of goods traded between the UK and the US each year, Mr Lang said moves to an entirely free world market would deliver lower prices. He said: "Just as there is no place for 'Little Englandism' we must be vigilant in ensuring that Europe has the vision to see beyond the bogus attractions of 'Little Europeanism'."

Colonial jumps mutual ship

Cliff Jones

AUSTRALIAN insurance and financial services company Colonial Group yesterday became the latest mutual to opt for a stock market flotation.

Some 360,000 policyholders in the UK will receive a bonus when the insurer goes public in a £1 billion flotation in the first half of 1997.

Colonial's chairman, David Adam, said at yesterday's annual general meeting: "It has not been possible for any company to limit itself to a mutual and still become viable."

The latest announcement signals another nail in the coffin of mutuality, following flotation announcements from building societies including the Woolwich and the Halifax.

The Halifax last month bought mutual insurer Clerical Medical for £200 million and the future of Friends Provident is in doubt after

Sum Alliance emerged as the favourite to take it over.

Colonial members will be invited to vote on the flotation proposals at an extraordinary general meeting in November. The Group has not yet decided whether the flotation will take place on the UK or the Australian market.

Malcolm Terling, a spokesman for the Association of British Insurers, said yesterday: "The whole life industry is reviewing its position as a mutual movement."

Colonial's UK subsidiary, ranked forty-third in the UK, has more than 600,000 British policyholders, although not all will benefit from the payout. The insurer has set a cut-off date of April 30 and people who took out policies after this date will not reap the rewards.

A spokeswoman for the society said those with Colonial personal equity plans will not receive a bonus, but more than 360,000 life and unit-linked policy holders are expected to benefit.



Noddy ready to motor with new chums

Roger Cowe

THE latest adventure of the Famous Five, Noddy and their chums from the Enid Blyton stable got under way yesterday when the new owner of the prolific author's output revealed the first stage of its plan to catapult them to worldwide brand stardom.

In true Blyton spirit, the adventure will take them to faraway places where they will face excitement and danger — in the form of rival characters ranging from Thomas the Tank Engine to the Disney team.

The Five, together with the Secret Seven, Noddy, and Blyton's lesser-known characters such as Amelia Jane, were acquired in January by the Trocadero company, which owns an entertainment complex at London's Piccadilly Circus.

Having obtained "the threshold" as chairman Nigel Wray put it yesterday, the company has since attempted to juggle 7,000 licensing contracts and plan "the comprehensive media and marketing support they deserve" — including a Disney-style parade of Blyton characters around the Trocadero.

The result will be a familiar merchandising blitz, taking in grocery promotions and a national treasure hunt. A television series of Blyton's Five stories, already shown in ITV and Tyne-Tees regions, will be screened nationally this summer and a second series is under way. It is planned jointly with the German public channel, ZDF.

Channel 5 will show an



No more PC Plod... Noddy contemplates Disney-style stardom. PHOTOGRAPH: GARRY WEASER

Enid Blyton adventure twice a week when it goes on air next year, and another series is being produced for New Zealand TV.

The BBC's Noddy series has already gone down well in Japan and 31 other countries, while BBC Books has sold the Noddy stories in Norwegian, Dutch and French.

This commercialisation sits uneasily with the innocence of Toytown and the Famous Five's pursuit of smugglers and ginger ale,

but it continues a tradition begun by Ms Blyton before her death in 1968.

Despite the innocence of her 1950s' stories, and her insistence that the aim was to aid children's education, Blyton launched a collection of Noddy torches, toys and toddlers' clothes.

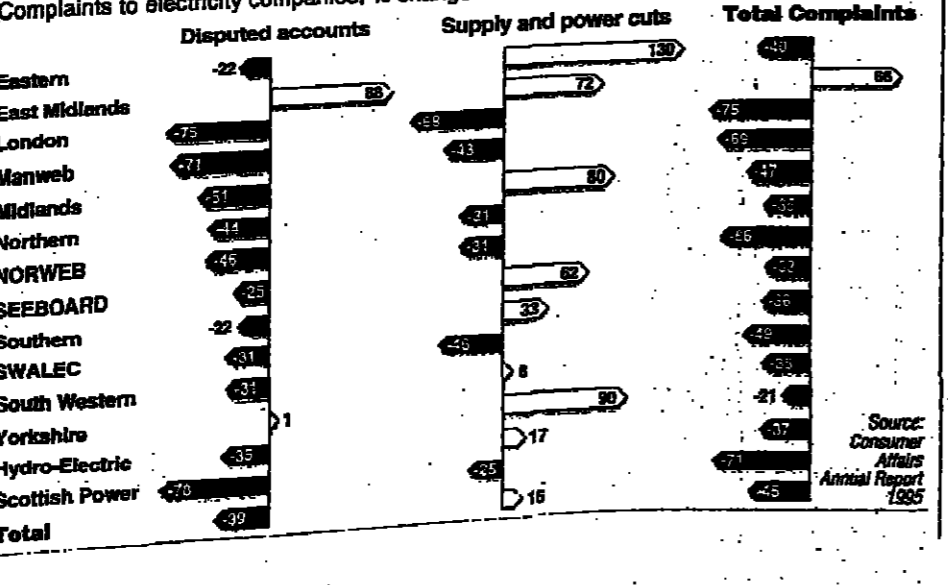
Sales have been about £1 million a year — a lot of ginger ale and ice cream for the Five, but it would not keep the modern executive in suits and champagne very long. "I would be most

disappointed if we didn't improve on that fairly quickly," said Mr Wray.

He aims to capitalise on Blyton's centenary by launching the characters into the 21st century, including new media such as CD-Rom. The centenary is not until next year, but as Mr Wray said: "Having a commercial eye on the matter, we're beginning celebrations this year."

Julian might think that mighty queer, but this is show business.

Blowing a fuse



Watchdog warns PowerGen not to renege

Chris Barrie

THE electricity generator PowerGen was warned yesterday by the industry watchdog that it would face a Monopolies and Mergers Commission inquiry if it reneged on undertakings to dispose of two power stations to Eastern Power, the regional electricity company owned by Hanson.

Professor Stephen Littlechild indicated that an MMC inquiry was inevitable if PowerGen chairman Ed Wallis carried out his threat of last week to hold on to 2,000 megawatts of generating capacity slated for sale to foster competition. The company's hard-line stance was taken after the Government

blocked its plans to buy Midlands Electricity.

Prof Littlechild said more competition was needed and that it would be a "serious refusal" if PowerGen refused to comply with the sale.

Although he refused to comment on speculation that the American utility the Southern Company was preparing a bid for PowerGen's larger rival, National Power, the watchdog indicated that he was against the creation of very large groups owning both generation and distribution.

Commenting on suggestions that National Power is preparing to announce hefty pay-outs to shareholders of up to £2 billion to stay loyal, Prof Littlechild said the company was "evidence of market power and very high profits."

Prof Littlechild was speaking at the publication of the annual report of the Office of Electricity Regulation (Ofreg). The report revealed complaints by customers have fallen by half since privatisation.

The main exception is at East Midlands Electricity, where complaints have increased by 66 per cent in the last year over accounts, power cuts, and payment terms for debts and disputes.

At its interim results last December, the company announced a £238 million special dividend for shareholders. The company denied that the rise in complaints was due to cost-cutting to finance shareholder pay-outs, but the result of an unexplained rise in queries which was already under control.

Deal struck on top pensions

Roger Cowe

COMPANIES will be required to disclose two sets of figures for the value of directors' pensions under a compromise reached in the battle between companies and shareholders.

The Stock Exchange has accepted the recommendations of the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries, asked by last year's Greenbury Committee on top pay to come up with a method of calculating the value of pension benefits.

The IFA stuck by its original recommendation that the best figure was the value of a pension if it were transferred to a different fund. But it has bowed to pressure from organisations like the Confed-

eration of British Industry and called for companies also to report the year's accrued benefit — the extra amount of annual pension as a result of the year's increases.

Companies will not have to disclose a transfer value if they provide enough detail for that to be worked out by a reader of the accounts.

Martin Broughton, chairman of the CBI's companies committee which has lobbied against the transfer value method, said: "These recommendations meet the need for greater transparency and openness called for in the Greenbury Report."

But the National Association of Pension Funds said it was glad that companies will also have to disclose transfer values.

TOURIST RATES — BANK BELLS

Australia 1.8575	France 7.50	Italy 2.310	Singapore 2.0675
Austria 15.7	Germany 2.2275	Spain 1.63	South Africa 6.59
Belgium 45.73	Greece 358.00	Netherlands 2.4975	Spain 10.29
Canada 2.00	Hong Kong 11.48	New Zealand 2.1325	Sweden 10.06
Cyprus 0.80	India 51.58	Norway 9.65	Switzerland 1.7975
Denmark 0.8375	Ireland 0.8375	Portugal 220.25	Turkey 107.587
Finland 7.21	Israel 4.81	Saudi Arabia 5.63	USA 1.4725

Supplied by NatWest Bank (excluding Indian rupee and Israeli shekel).

Cedric Brown retires feeling a little hurt. Martyn Halsall reports



Stepping off the gas... Richard Giordano, chairman, in the background as chief executive Cedric Brown rounds on his critics. PHOTOGRAPH BY SEAN SMITH

Scalded fat cat exits

CEDRIC Brown, the most vilified company director of recent years, yesterday retired as chief executive of British Gas admitting he had been hurt by the scalding acrimony over his £475,000 salary.

Industry's most prominent "fat cat" was combative to the end. He rounded on critical media questions, after the company's annual meeting in Birmingham, and censured the Government for insufficient enthusiasm towards privatisation.

"I regret the Government didn't stand up and argue the case for privatisation," he said. "I think they let it drift and let it run away from them."

He denied that controversy over his salary "tarnished" privatisation. Declining further comment on his 75 per cent increase, which turned last year's annual meeting into a verbal battlefield, Mr Brown said of the jibes: "Undoubtedly some of it did hurt — if you are a human being, some of that is going to hurt."

But he robustly defended changes sweeping "the best gas company in the world" and claimed lapses in stan-

dards of service would be rectified. Figures published yesterday showed customer complaints rose 11 per cent in the first three months of 1996, to a record 14,898.

"Standards have fallen; there is no doubt about that," Mr Brown said. Change could not proceed without some difficulties.

Mr Brown, who entered the industry 43 years ago as a laboratory assistant, testing gas at Rotherham, plans to include fishing and more time with his family in a future financed by a £250,000 pension and a £121,000 one-year consultancy with British Gas.

He might also become an author, he hinted yesterday. "Before I start rambling on I'd better save something for my book," he said.

The meeting, with only 500 largely specific shareholders and without "Cedric" the overweight protest pig, contained few references to his finances. Richard Giordano, the chairman, drew some applause when he praised Mr Brown for his part in the company's development.

Tony Augarde, a 60-year-old Oxford artist, repeated his call of last year for the resignation of the entire board after a "catastrophic year"

for British Gas. "I am glad to see that Cedric Brown, although belatedly, has taken my advice," he said.

Other shareholders criticised government gas competition policy and Mr Giordano indicated his agreement. Competition, originally intended for completion by 2002, had been accelerated to 1998, threatening a crisis when potential oversupply was linked with a collapse in the spot price, he said.

"As long as such a huge proportion of the available gas is locked up at high prices, well above the current market, the full benefits of liberalisation will not be achieved," said Mr Giordano.

"The plain fact is that with the domestic market opening up to competition in the next two years, the current situation is unsustainable. It threatens the orderly transition to a fully competitive market."

Mr Giordano said "mutually acceptable changes" to gas contracts were being pursued with producers to achieve deals "that recognise current market realities".

He drew a contrast with deregulated markets overseas where solutions had been brokered "in an even-handed manner by regulatory authorities and governments".

He also threatened to take to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission the new pricing formula for transmitting gas if this failed to "strike an equitable balance" between the interests of shareholders and consumers.

Parting thoughts

On privatisation:

'I regret the Government didn't stand up and argue the case for privatisation. I think they let it drift and let it run away from them'

On his critics:

'Undoubtedly some of it did hurt — if you are a human being, some of that is going to hurt'

On customer service:

'Standards have fallen; there is no doubt about that'

Dark Continent for stressed pilots

Workface

Keith Harper

IT IS NOT all plain flying for airline pilots these days. They are worried about safety and stress and, with increasing competition among the world's airlines, face growing pressure from employers to adopt new working conditions.

Such feelings pervaded the pilots' international conference, which has just finished in Dublin. Lack of safety precautions, particularly in Third World countries, was alleged to be one reason for some recent serious air crashes.

Captain Rob McInnis, chairman of the International Federation of Airline Pilots, highlighted the problem of aircraft and crew being hired from a foreign source, questioning whether plane and personnel were "properly documented, maintained and qualified".

He said several countries had "notoriously liberal" rules governing their air transport industry and several areas of non-compliance with standards set by the International Civil Aviation Transport Organisation.

At grass roots level, IALPA's associations were under attack. In countries like Turkey it couldn't fulfil its role as the industry's "safety conscience" because it had been shut down by the authorities. IALPA had developed a safety oversight programme, but this relied on the co-operation of participating countries. He said that some foreign civil aviation authorities were incapable of meeting IALPA's standards.

Safety factors vary considerably in different parts of the world. Europeans are trying to protect working conditions, while Africans and South Americans are fighting

to secure for their pilots basic standards that colleagues in the West have accepted as the norm for years.

The hazards of flying were underlined during a secret session of IALPA, which designated "virtually the entire African continent" as having "critically deficient airspace".

For political reasons, IALPA is reluctant to draw attention to such criticism. Its local members have to co-exist with their own governments and pilots do not see it as their business to create scare stories to frighten the public from flying, particularly to holiday destinations.

But many pilots are wary of airspace over the African continent because they think that radar is inadequate and ground-to-air communication poor.

Even so, African pilots manage. In the conference bars, they defended the conditions they had to work under, saying that developing countries could not afford to install the kind of technical equipment used in other continents. One of them suggested that the larger air carriers which fly into Africa might contribute towards improvements.

A pilot from a West Indian island with close links to Britain described how his local organisation is involved in talks with his government in an effort to get landing lights installed at isolated airports. It gets dark very quickly after 5pm and if services are delayed, pilots have to land blind. "We have not had a serious accident yet but it is waiting to happen," he said.

Captain McInnis echoed this concern. He said many members were being deprived of their basic rights and that to break the influence of IALPA, pilots were being forced to sign individual contracts. The present accident rate is unsustainable, he argued, and he wants to make sure that efforts to improve it are now concentrated on the Third World.

News in brief

Press group merger nets Hollick £2.2m

LORD Hollick, chief executive of Daily Express publisher United News and Media, yesterday picked up £2.2 million as part of the company's recent merger with his MAI media and money broking group. The Labour peer received the payment after agreeing to waive his rights to options over MAI shares which he had previously been granted under the company's employee share ownership scheme.

MAI said Lord Hollick — who earns £558,000 a year — had waived his annual bonus payments every year since 1988, and the options were over shares bought on his behalf by the scheme's trustees with those bonuses. Lord Hollick's colleague Charles Gregson, now chief executive of money broking at the merged group, received just under £1.5 million as part of a similar arrangement.

The pair have converted other shares and share options in MAI into shares and options in United, under the same terms as the merger. Under the conversion, details of which were provided by United yesterday, Lord Hollick now has 306,717 United shares — worth £2.1 million at last night's closing price — and options over another 861,619 shares. The price at which the options can be exercised was not disclosed. — Ian King

GA moves into Europe

GENERAL Accident, one of the big five composite insurers, yesterday began delivering promises of expansion in Europe when it bought two German insurance units owned by Union des Assurances de Paris (UAP) for 561 million. Analysts said the purchase of general business UAP Allgemaine and life office UAP Leben was a sensible, if cautious move.

Deregulation in Germany will present many insurers with challenging market conditions. "This is an exciting and fast moving market place, with considerable strategic importance to us," said GA's group chief executive Bob Scott. Group general manager Russell Evans said the company was considering merging UAP Allgemaine. — Reuter

Home-buying gets cheaper

THE cost of buying a home has fallen to its lowest level in almost 20 years, according to figures from TSB. The bank said in a report published yesterday that a combination of April's tax changes and low mortgage rates meant that affordability was likely to improve into the summer.

It said that a typical couple can expect to spend £13.80 of their take-home pay on each £100 of their mortgage. House price figures published later today by the Halifax and Nationwide are expected to record a 1 per cent increase on the month. — Cliff Jones

Vulkan debt deal unlikely

BREMER Vulkan, Germany's largest shipbuilder which filed for protection from its creditors in February, said yesterday it did not believe a debt deal with creditors could be reached. The company said its management board had informed the Bremen district court that debt composition proceedings could not go ahead.

Under German law, failure of an insolvent company to arrange debt composition means that it must file for bankruptcy. The announcement had been widely expected after the company said in March that writedowns had wiped out the sprawling group's equity capital of DM1.4 billion. — Reuter

Food industry sinks its teeth into beef alternatives

OUTLOOK/Companies bounce back after seeing £1.2bn wiped off market values in BSE crisis. TONY MAY reports

THE food industry is catching its breath as the initial panic over BSE subsides. The industry will continue for the British farmer but food processing, distribution and marketing companies are regrouping and finding substitutes for beef. They are also seeking salvation in the growing trend of eating out.

The immediate impact of the beef crisis has been severe. The meat processing and manufacturing sector is predicted to lose 17 per cent of its output this year, while the food manufacturing industry as a whole will lose 4 per cent, according to the latest Business Forecast by Charterhouse, the investment banking group.

The report notes that even before the latest BSE scare, the consumer was switching away from red meat on health grounds and says that so far there has been no compensating growth in consumption of white meats, although pork is becoming more popular.

A month ago, with the panic at its height, the City wiped £1.2 billion off the stock market value of the companies thought to be most at risk.

Unigate, Northern Foods — the UK's biggest milk supplier — and Whitchurch, a meat processor and distributor, fell 17 per cent.

The fall was an attempt by the market to anticipate the furthest extent of the food industry's problems and there has been a recovery by some of these companies since as consumer confidence has shown signs of rallying — with the help of hefty price cuts by supermarkets.

In a note to investors on Monday, analysts at NatWest Securities said that the market had overdone the fall in the case of Dalgety, Devro and Unigate as the first two had made strategic acquisitions and the third had the comfort of a significant cash pile.

Even one of the worst affected companies, Whitchurch Group, has seen its

FAST food chain Wimpy announced a radical overhaul of its menu amid a continuing slump in sales of beefburgers.

The company is introducing no fewer than 10 brand new dishes, featuring turkey, lamb, pork and cod, plus a vegetarian alternative.

"We have every confidence in the safety of the beef we source, but we recognise that some customers are looking for alternatives," said Wimpy managing director Max Woolfe.

The move increases at a stroke the number of dishes on the chain's menu by around one third.

Traditional beefburgers, which have been sourced from Dutch, French and Irish beef since the mad cow disease crisis erupted, will continue to be sold at Wimpy's 272 restaurants around the UK.

A spokeswoman said that customers had "rotted with their feet" in deserting beef products. "We have experienced a drop of 20 per cent in our beef lines, which equates to around 100,000 meals a week which have either switched to non-beef products or disappeared totally."

said that 75 to 80 per cent of group turnover has historically been while the beef crisis has had a dramatic short-term effect on the food market, its suppliers and customers, there is powerful growth in eating out and catering generally, and that this will have a bigger long-term influence on the UK food sector.

It may be of no comfort to the beef industry, but spending on eating out is expected to rise by 3.3 per cent a year, in real terms by 2001 with pub food — which accounted for 16 per cent of eating out in 1995 — expected to grow by 8.5 per cent in the next five years.

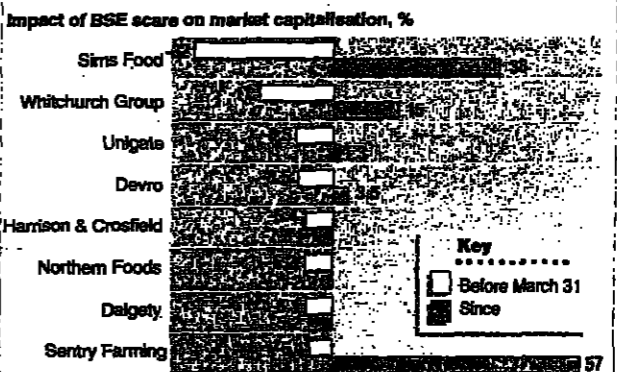
Despite the beef crisis, the food market as a whole is set to grow at 1.6 per cent a year until 2001, compared with the 0.5 per cent a year seen between 1990 and 1995.

So far this year, the shares of food producers have underperformed a booming stock market by 7 per cent.

shares rally by 15 per cent since March 31. The group said yesterday that both its catering division and burger manufacturing businesses had suffered from the BSE crisis but both were recovering from the impact.

Barry Cox, the chairman,

Mixed fortunes



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Cricket

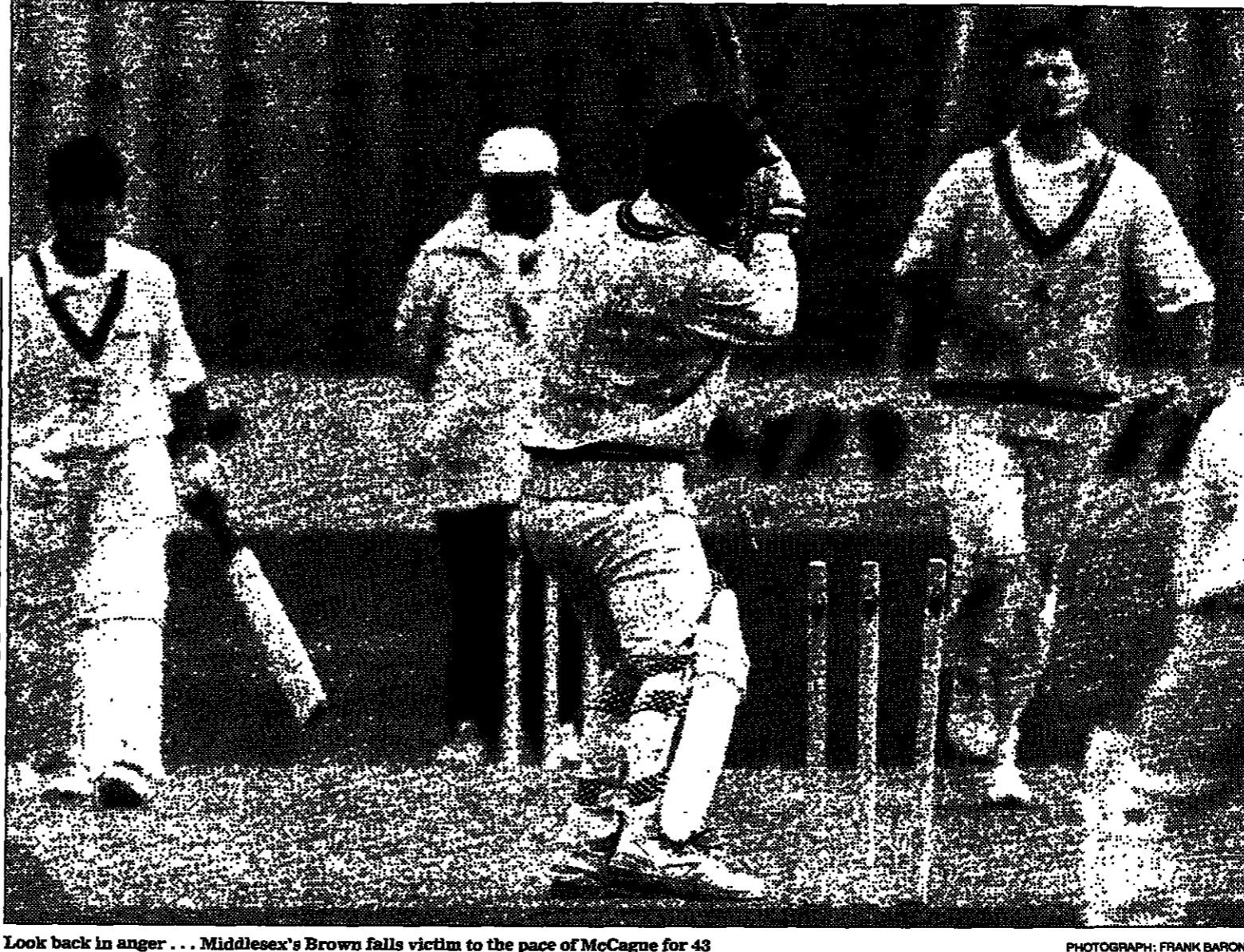
Benson & Hedges Cup: Kent v Middlesex

Carry on Doctor

Paul Weaver at Canterbury

DR JULIAN THOMPSON is only one of four first-class matches, but he must have considered retirement at the end of last season. He had dismissed Brian Lara for a duck in each innings here last July — the great man's only pain — his career could only decline after such a triumph. Happily for Kent, though, he stayed on to perform more wonders, and he duly took the Gold Award against Middlesex yesterday for three catches, including those of Jason Pooley and Paul Weekes with successive balls. A sharpish right-arm bowler who can get the ball seaming, he also had Mike Gatting brilliantly caught behind. That burst, and another casually destructive half-century by Carl Hooper, gave last year's runners-up their third convincing win in as many group matches and virtually guaranteed them a quarter-final place. With four rounders in the side, counting the wicketkeeper, they have the batting depth required in the one-day game. Middlesex, meanwhile, have made an awful start.

Their three defeats have realistically put them out of the competition and, rather like Kent's win, there has been a conclusive air to them. They lost this game by six wickets with 18 balls to spare. John Emburey is badly missed but their batting has been their real sorrow, with only John Carr in good form. Middlesex chose to bat on a hand-looking pitch, so the good Doctor Thompson's incisive came as a surprise. When Mark Ramprakash was caught behind, cutting, they were 79 for four and a drift. But Carr then scored his third successive fifty, attacking Mark Ealham with relish, and made 55 from 72 balls before running himself out. He added 59 for the fifth wicket with Keith Brown but it was the sixth-wicket stand which was the more interesting; another 59 was added by Brown and Owais Shah, who is only 17 but managed an unbeaten 42 from 38 balls which included a mighty six over long-on off Martin McCague. Just before the end Ealham hit an even bigger six, into the stands off the Frank Woolley Stand off Phil Tufnell, though by then Hooper had followed his 98 on Sunday with a polished 82 and Middlesex were doomed.



Look back in anger... Middlesex's Brown falls victim to the pace of McCague for 43

Derbyshire v Lancashire

Cork right on the nose

David Hopps at Chesterfield

DOMINIC CORK at his most ebullient provided reassuring proof yesterday that he is one England player quickly casting aside his World Cup depression. Lancashire resume against Derbyshire today at 70 for six, still 69 runs short of victory, with Cork having three more overs in which to enhance his five-wicket return. Queen's Park with the sap barely risen is a customary haven for seam bowlers, and Cork, who habitually torments Lancashire in this competition, performed like a man overdoing on oxygen. Derbyshire's paltry total of 137, combined with a responsive pitch, brought a desperate, attacking edge to his bowling. When the ball did not swing he regularly over-pitched around leg stump — he conceded 43 in seven overs — but when he got it right he was devastating. Gailan shuffled suspiciously to be leg-before in Cork's second over, and Yates received the type of welcome that will make pinch-hitters an endangered species. His first ball was a vicious bouncer that required swift evasive action; he second, short of a length, flew off the glove and was deflected by the diving Adams at second slip to Jones at first. Crawley, pushing at an out-swing, followed for nought in Cork's next over. Atherton was a debatable casualty to conclude an inspired spell of four for nine in 11 balls as Cork won a leg before decision with a delivery arguably bound down the leg side. Rain then forced a stoppage of nearly three hours and when play resumed in steady drizzle — for only five deliveries in early evening — the force was still with him. He slammed his first ball short and wide, whereupon Watkinson slashed it to second slip. Derbyshire had batted indifferently after Jones, their new Australian captain, had discarded his previous hat-trick by opting to bat. Watkinson's five-wicket bounty overemphasised the perils of his medium pace. Adams, the most purposeful Derbyshire batsman, was defeated by one that bounced and left him, and Cork carved a sharp change to backward point. Atherton, the catcher, will have been more satisfied with the outcome on this occasion.

Nottinghamshire v Worcestershire

Hick starts suicide slide

Mike Selvey at Trent Bridge

DESPITE the flurry of strokes from the Nottinghamshire captain Paul Johnson that finally carried his side to a five-wicket win over Worcestershire, it had been a close-run thing between the weather and the cricket for the dullness award. The cricket won: it was so bewilderingly awful that perhaps Dennis Potter wrote the script. Worcestershire squandered a decent start in which they reached 130 for one in the 23rd over, instead of pushing on to competitive total, they lost nine wickets for 88 runs and were all out for 188. The losing semi-finalists of last year are thus out of this year's competition. The key middle-order wicket...

of Greens Hick, Tom Moody, David Leatherdale and Tim Curtis fell within a five-over period when the Nottinghamshire spinners Richard Bates (two for 21) and Andy Afford (one for 21) were bowling in tandem. The slump began with Hick, who as usual had looked mechanically threatening and had reached 40 when he attempted to hoist Bates's second delivery over the mid-wicket boundary, hit the ball too straight and saw Paul Pollard take an awkward running catch in the deep. In Bates's next over Moody, seeing a run to mid-wicket that was indiscernible to his batting partner Curtis, was sent back but stranded by Johnson's throw. Two balls later Curtis pushed to mid-on and Leatherdale backed up too eagerly and was beaten by Tolley's throw to the bowler's end. Three overs on from that, Curtis, who had begun the innings in the grandest possible style by driving the first two deliveries of the match back past the bowler David Penrett, was bowled by Afford trying to chop an arm ball to Somerset's 239 for eight, but the weather coming down from the hills was forecast to continue today and Somerset's average is better. That Somerset reached as many as they did, on a wicket initially damp and difficult, was due mainly to the unlikely pairing of Rob Turner, an even more unlikely statistic, made 70 off 75 balls. It used to be said that this quietly efficient wicketkeeper was an incorrigible pedestrian batsman. He would stand at the crease, academically tall as he is a Cambridge man, seemingly bereft of strokes though never to be discounted in a crisis. Yet, twice bat bowler in an early over but his suspect accuracy was never far away. For those Somerset supporters who had journeyed across the Severn by way of the costly bridge toll, there was some reward in the performance of Caddick. This was his first competitive match of the season after shin operations and then, the other day, a worrying back strain. He bowled well within himself but let go the occasional delivery with deceptive venom. He had James beautifully caught one-handed by Trump at gully, and Morris taken at the wicket attempting a second six.

Glamorgan v Somerset

Turner scales new height

David Foot at Cardiff

MATTHEW MAYNARD and Adrian Dale were looking increasingly in charge when the rain finally curtailed play yesterday with Glamorgan 108 for two after 27 overs in reply to Somerset's 239 for eight, but the weather coming down from the hills was forecast to continue today and Somerset's average is better. That Somerset reached as many as they did, on a wicket initially damp and difficult, was due mainly to the unlikely pairing of Rob Turner, an even more unlikely statistic, made 70 off 75 balls. It used to be said that this quietly efficient wicketkeeper was an incorrigible pedestrian batsman. He would stand at the crease, academically tall as he is a Cambridge man, seemingly bereft of strokes though never to be discounted in a crisis. Yet, twice bat bowler in an early over but his suspect accuracy was never far away. For those Somerset supporters who had journeyed across the Severn by way of the costly bridge toll, there was some reward in the performance of Caddick. This was his first competitive match of the season after shin operations and then, the other day, a worrying back strain. He bowled well within himself but let go the occasional delivery with deceptive venom. He had James beautifully caught one-handed by Trump at gully, and Morris taken at the wicket attempting a second six.

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Glamorgan's bowling was as varied as the climate. Dale bowled three wickets in an over and then had Harden playing on. Thomas, small and nippy, twice bat bowler in an early over but his suspect accuracy was never far away. For those Somerset supporters who had journeyed across the Severn by way of the costly bridge toll, there was some reward in the performance of Caddick. This was his first competitive match of the season after shin operations and then, the other day, a worrying back strain. He bowled well within himself but let go the occasional delivery with deceptive venom. He had James beautifully caught one-handed by Trump at gully, and Morris taken at the wicket attempting a second six.

Cunliffe comes of age

THE grizzled Graham Gooch became the first player to score 5,000 runs in the Benson and Hedges Cup with a 100 off 104 balls yesterday against the British Universities at Chelmsford, but mostly it was a day for young players to excel. The fresh-faced Rob Cunliffe (Gloucestershire), Paul Whitaker (Hampshire) and Ronnie Irani (Essex) all won Gold Awards. And the slightly more seasoned Alistair Brown (Surrey) played another destructive innings. Cunliffe, a 22-year-old playing only his second B&H match, scored 137 off 143 balls in Gloucestershire's 307 for four against a wayward Surrey attack at The Oval. But he was upstaged by the 26-year-old Brown, who hit 82 off 57 balls to put Surrey on the way to a three-wicket win. After Gooch scored his 10th B&H century, the 24-year-old Irani took over at Chelmsford, belting an unbeaten 62 off 28 balls and then taking four for 30 as the Universities finished 107 runs short of Essex's 331 for five. Whitaker, a 22-year-old left-hander, hit an aggressive 53 at Southampton. Hampshire made only 235 for nine but it proved more than enough as Sussex subsided to 168 all out.

Hockey

Double series triumph lifts Britain's Olympic women

Pat Rowley

GREAT BRITAIN'S women claimed their second Pre-Games Test series in Atlanta yesterday with a 3-2 victory over Spain. The Olympic champions, Britain had defeated the United States, the World Cup bronze medalists, 2-0 in a three-Test series, and have now beaten Spain 3-1. Spain, who drew their series with the US, could have done the same against Britain by winning yesterday but their hopes vanished when they trailed 3-0 in 38 minutes. Scotland's Sue Fraser put Britain ahead in the 13th minute with a firm drive, her first goal in Atlanta. England's Mandy Nicholls then celebrated her 50th cap for Britain by scoring her first goal of the tour, and spectacularly put away down the left wing by Mandy Davies, she took on the defence and scored with a remarkable reverse-stick sweep shot. Six minutes later Jane Smith set up the third goal with a 60-yard run and pass to Tina Challen, who chipped the ball reverse-stick over the goalkeeper. Spain came back with goals by Maider Telleria (penalty stroke) and their captain Natalia Dorado (penalty corner). Britain's delighted manager, agent Jenny Cardwell said afterwards: "Britain's game has moved up several gears. We are now playing as a squad not a collection of individuals." Britain have simulated their Olympic programme, plus several matches in 12 days, and have won five, drawn one and lost one.

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Table Tennis

England lose and win bronze

Richard Jago in Bratislava

ENGLAND'S women lost 4-0 to Hungary here yesterday but still took a European Championships bronze medal. Lisa Lomas, England's outstanding player here with six wins, might have changed the course of the semi-final had she capitalised on a lead of 13-11 in the third game against the opening contest against Vivien Elio. But the Hungarian made progress with a steady slow loop on the forehand, mixed with the ability to pick the right moments for a fast kill. Six points out of seven went Elio's way, and at 11-16 Lomas was shown a yellow card for a remark made when her backhand hit took a net cord and jumped off. Elio's 21-15, 11-21, 21-18 was enough to convince England all was lost. Alison Broc lost 21-7, 21-14 to the former European champion Csilla Batorfi. Andrea Holt was rarely in it against Kristina Toth, and the doubles was a disaster. England's men lost 4-1 to Sweden and face a relegation play-off against the Netherlands today. But there was one spectacular English success when Alex Perry, aged 20, scored his first international win by beating the Olympic champion Jan-Ove Waldner 19-21, 13-21, 21-18. Waldner coasted up to 18-18 in the third game and was then surprised by a sudden bombardment of two-winged attacks.

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Scoreboard

Benson and Hedges Cup

Table with columns for teams (Kent, Middlesex, Lancashire, Derbyshire, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Somerset, Glamorgan, Essex, Surrey, Warwickshire, Nottinghamshire, Worcestershire, Kent, Middlesex, Lancashire, Derbyshire, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Somerset, Glamorgan, Essex, Surrey, Warwickshire, Nottinghamshire, Worcestershire) and scores.

Derbyshire v Lancashire

Table with columns for Derbyshire and Lancashire players and scores.

Gloucestershire v Surrey

Table with columns for Gloucestershire and Surrey players and scores.

Derbyshire v Lancashire

Table with columns for Derbyshire and Lancashire players and scores.

Derbyshire v Lancashire

Table with columns for Derbyshire and Lancashire players and scores.

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SportsGuardian

BUSINESS AS USUAL AFTER SNOOKER'S ENFANT TERRIBLE ESCAPES WITH A FINE

O'Sullivan runs into trouble at the table

Clive Everton sees a lucky man contest the quarter-finals

RONNIE O'Sullivan, the luckiest man in the tournament, strode into the Crucible Theatre spotlight here yesterday and soon encountered difficulties against John Higgins in the quarter-finals of the Embassy World Championship.

By the evening it looked as if O'Sullivan — less ebullient than usual but not noticeably short of confidence — might lose. But even if he does, his £30,000 prize-money will cover the punishment imposed on him by the World Professional Billiards and Snooker Association for assaulting its assistant press officer Michael Ganley on Sunday.

The mood in the building was in sombre contrast to the atmosphere as Monday night's verdict was reached after a four-hour meeting.

At a midnight press conference the association announced the fine — a record, £3,000 higher than the one imposed on Alex Higgins for "serial offending" — but even after O'Sullivan has made an additional "voluntary" contribution of £10,000 to two charities, his outgoings will be matched by his prize-money even if Higgins beats him.

The financial penalty reflects the severity of the assault, and it was valid for O'Sullivan to claim in his public apology that it was "out of character", but the feeling among the circuit's insiders was that the disciplinary committee had been too lenient.

An exception was John Virgo, who condemned the offence but said there was "a time for forgiveness". But the fine and a two-year suspension from the game — itself suspended for two years — might be seen as too much forgiveness too soon.

O'Sullivan's manager Barry Hearn, making a rare appearance at a snooker tournament, commented with some justification: "Our lawyers did a good job."

What was said to the disciplinary hearing has yet to leak out but the WPBSA's



Ready to go... O'Sullivan waits in the wings yesterday, the morning after a long night before PHOTOGRAFER MICHAEL STEELE

much maligned constitution and disciplinary code, picked over in previous cases more voraciously than a Christmas turkey, may well have been gnawed again.

The recent abolition of a seven-day cooling-off period after an alleged offence was well intended, but perversely it made more difficult Higgins's preparations for arguably the

most important match of a career that has already yielded five major titles.

Only 11 hours before he was due to play his first World quarter-final, his psychological focus was blurred by the possibility that he might advance to the semi-finals by default — a prospect which he was honest enough to admit would not appal him.

Hearn said: "I always felt common sense would prevail. The punishment is hard but fair. Alex Higgins would not have been world champion if he had conformed, but I hope Ronnie tempers his temper."

High-profile players who lead vivid off-table lives usually command more media attention and sell more tickets than the model professional that Higgins is and that O'Sullivan — according to what he said in his apology — aspires to become.

Jimmy White has a racy off-table life without a hint of violent conduct, and young players would do well to

match his perfect table manners and his in-play comments.

Nobody wants to stifle O'Sullivan's virtuosity and showmanship, but Sunday's assault, his recent accumulation of petty behaviour, and a punishment less severe than many of his professional peers feel others might have received have depleted the goodwill once felt towards him.

If he or Higgins is to be the one to succeed Stephen Hendry as the youngest champion, the widespread feeling is that Higgins is the more worthy.

Lawnmower powers into pole position



Vincent Hanna

FOR some time I wanted to vent my spleen about Formula One racing but I lacked the specialised hands-on experience. Things have changed.

Every April when things go missing, like the barbecue or small children, I notice that the grass is long. I drag out the lawnmower and take it to the lawnmower hospital, where they say there's a long queue and come back in July.

So Hugo's friend Rod comes round and cuts the grass. Yesterday he brought a gleaming red monster with rotating blades and a seat. For a tanner he allowed me to drive it while he drank my beer under the oak tree.

I was damn good. Apart from the incident when the conservatory backed into me, I turned in three hours of nerveless cornering — and edging.

I know now what the Schumachers go through. Don't tell me about life-and-death struggles with finely tuned machines. I have earned the right to say F1 racing is a waste of time.

Not for sporting journalists, mind you. We drift about in a glamorous *demimonde* behind wire fences, where cigarette manufacturers dispense reassurance, and men in tight suits with crooked smiles and a hint of danger pour champagne for blonde women with stop-watches. I've done it. I had a great time.

But it's nothing to do with sport. Formula One is a contest for organisers of technology. A parade of mobile computers. There is excitement at the track — with the noise, the smell, and the collective frenzy of the fans. But it is spectacle, not sport.

Well, that's what I think. Let me offer you three paradoxes. The first is about television.

Motor racing was popularised on TV in the 1970s by Jonathan Martin of the BBC, who was obsessed with Niki Lauda. He also got worked up, I recall, about Arnie and Virginia Wade. Anyway, in those days the "home" network paid for televising its own grand prix and the rest of Eurovision got it for peanuts.

So the cigarette makers, who had been hit by the 1966

ban on TV adverts, cashed in on the soaring viewing figures that Jonathan served up with the aid of Jackie Stewart, James Hunt and Murray Walker. Now they pay through the nose.

Any serious F1 team needs annual sponsorship of £40 million. Sponsors get their names on the car in 16 appearances on TV. Some gear the money to the number of seconds their car is actually seen.

The paradox is that F1 racing collects twice for the same thing. The sponsors fork out to see their labels flash by on TV at 150mph. Then television has to pay up to provide the medium for the message. If it didn't, the sport would wither.

Paradox Two is about car design. Schumacher's performance at the Nürburgring was brilliant, pushing himself into second place whereas his team-mate Eddie Irvine hardly got off the grid. But his car was not only 8mph slower than the Williams, its design made close-quarter manoeuvring difficult.

At the Ferrari pushed into Villeneuve's slipstream it became aerodynamically compromised, and less efficient. So the better Schumacher drove, the less he looked like passing. He needed a mistake from the Canadian, who did not oblige.

Once, motor racing was organised so that driving skills ranked equal to or higher than technological achievement. Have another look at the 1966 Frankenhauser film Grand Prix and you'll see what I mean. Now they are one factor in a complicated equation and most argue that, although things are better than in 1962, driving skills are not the decisive factor.

PARADOX Three is about circuits. Most of the current grand prix tracks are designed less for contests of driving skill than for processions. Critics cite Imola, venue of the San Marino GP, where a classic combination of fast bend/long straight/slow turn, a test of nerve and engine power, has been eliminated after the deaths of Senna and Ratzemberger.

Yet my colleague Alan Henry argues that you can still provide marvellous — and safe — racing. "Look how it used to be in Buenos Aires before they revamped it into a bland circuit."

I hear that the sport's governing body FIA is rethinking the whole boring business. I can provide experimental facilities on my back lawn, on Sundays, every fortnight. I'll even let them drive — for a tanner.



Ebdon in record ripping form

AVIOLENT miscue on a frame-ball red by Peter Ebdon made possibly the worst rip of a cloth in tournament history and caused his quarter-final to be adjourned for the day with him leading Steve Davis 5-1, writes Clive Everton. Running repairs after Ebdon had eventually taken the frame to lead 2-1 enabled him to make his fourth clearance of the tournament, 137, before a new cloth was deemed essential.

The champion Stephen Hendry came back from 1-3 to take a 5-3 overnight lead over Darren Morgan.

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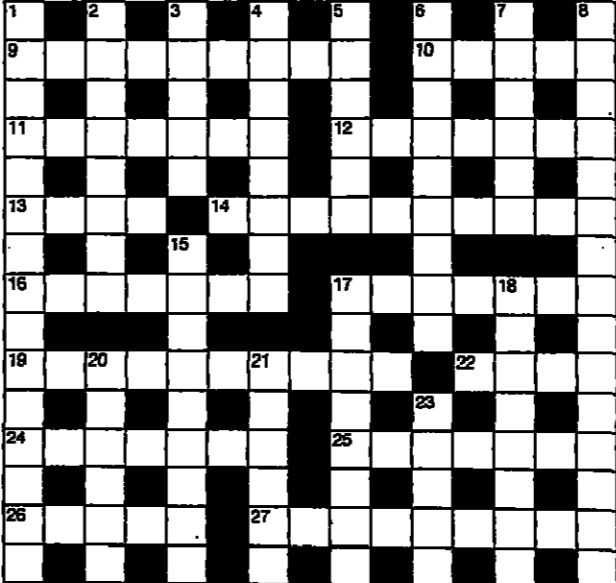


There are similarities between the themes and the issues of the Scott play, Half The Picture, which caught the imagination of a theatre audience. Indeed, we have drawn attention to this by using the same actors. Richard Norton-Taylor

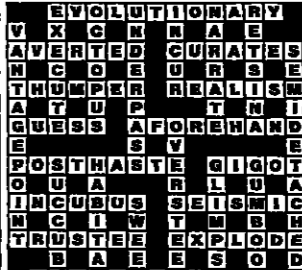
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Guardian Crossword No 20,641

Set by Araucaria



- Across**
- 9 Beheaded Scots king on lion destroyed as against church law (9)
 - 10 Take one writer and get less Green? (5)
 - 11 Beauty who provides weapons for church? (7)
 - 12 Beauty who should be dipped? (7)
 - 13,22 Signs of love and peace are our pidgeon (4-4)
 - 14 Meaty drink felled a Sioux plot (6,4)
 - 16 Flying shoes give fever a fresh start (7)
 - 17 Fire, inversely the beauty queen of hell? (7)
 - 19 Blot out number on list — it's beautiful (10)
 - 22 See 13
 - 24 Composer gives short story new ending (7)
 - 25 Copper's accepting Indian
- Down**
- dress, back and chest protector (7)
 - 26 Turn to dormouse for fruit without beauty (5)
 - 27 Trendy copper's warning shows carelessness (9)
- Solution tomorrow**



CROSSWORD SOLUTION 20,640

forces to raise voices without beauty (15)

- 15 Tell the police about some celebrities having no beauty (8)
- 17 Tact finds beauty in food (8)
- 18 Being equally pressured is nothing with a crib available (8)
- 20 Volley exchanged with beauty (8)
- 21 Beauty causes trouble and rising wickedness (6)
- 23 Beauty and the beast that's little outside home (3-2)

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